OCTOBER, 1950

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ARGOSY

STORIES BY

DAVID WALKER

CLIVE BURNLEY

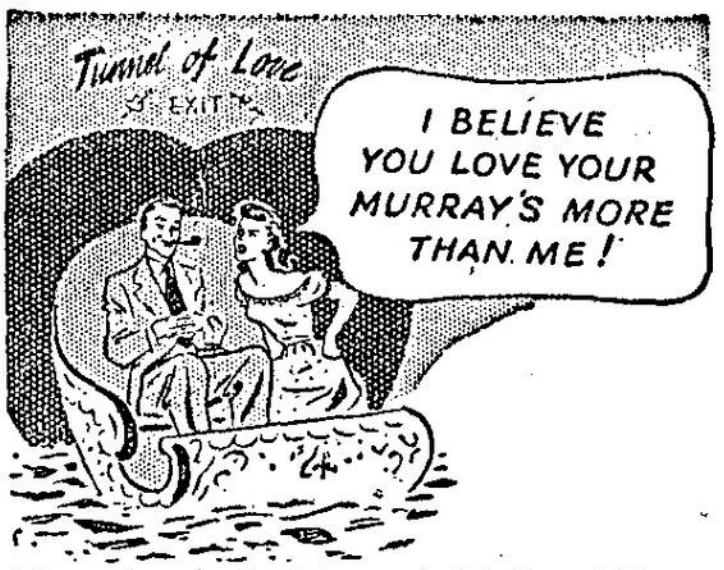
WILL F. JENKINS

AGATHA CHRISTIE

FRANK O'CONNOR

RAY BRADBURY

AND OTHERS



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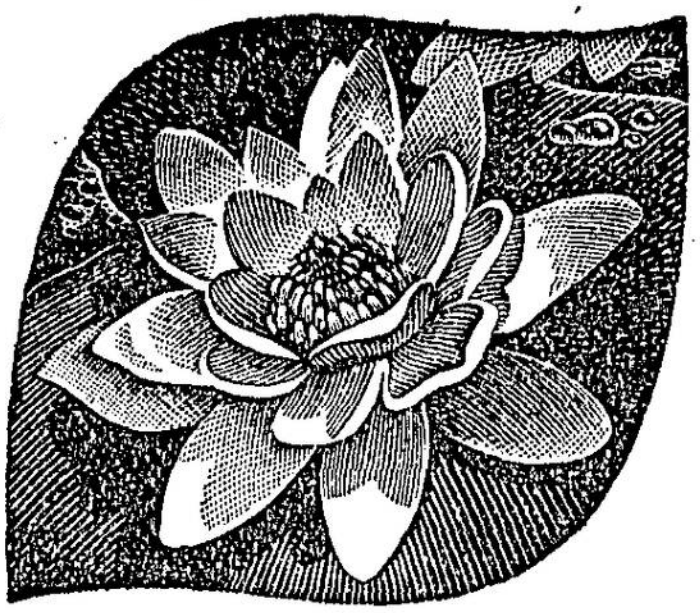

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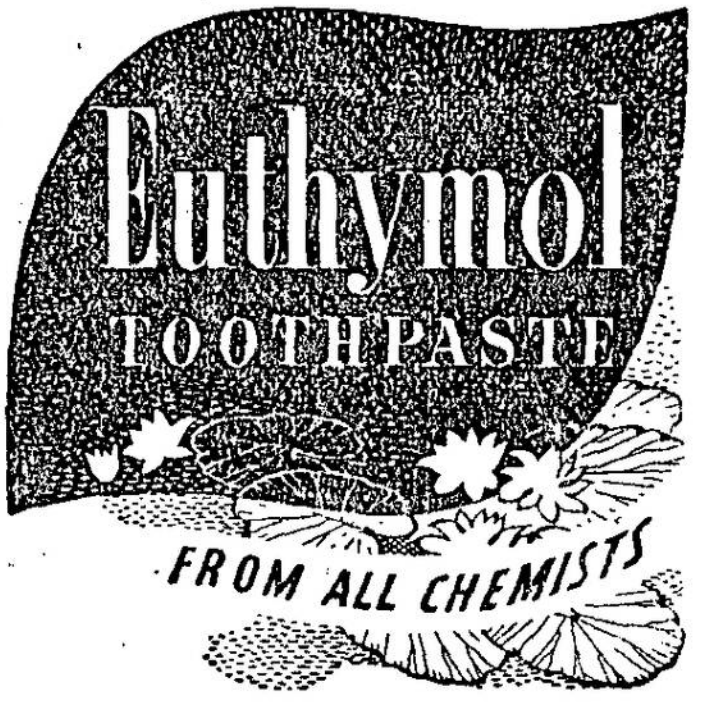

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* * *

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Having now finished your Short Story Course, I feel I must write to you and show my appreciation for the help, guidance and friendly but firm criticism that you have given to me while under your excellent tutorship.
I am a bus driver and my spare time is very limited, but with your help I had a short story published by *Reveille*, 5/8/49. That was after the sixth lesson.
Before I had been suffering under the illusion that story writing was a field for professionals only.

TO THOSE PEOPLE WHO FEEL THEY CAN WRITE, BUT LACK THE CONFIDENCE TO HAVE A TRY, MY ADVICE TO THEM IS TO TAKE YOUR COURSE; I CAN'T SEE HOW THEY CAN FAIL.
Lack of education is no bar; I left school at the age of thirteen. *T. P., STOKE-ON-TRENT.*

. . I felt I had to write and tell you my good news. I heard from the B.B.C., this a.m., and they have accepted story—GOLDSMITH TO THE KING—and a play NO NEW BOOKS FOR SALE. You can imagine how thrilled was to have two acceptances at once.
April, 1950. *Miss M. M., COLWYN BAY.*

. . Thank you for your letter and the very useful criticism. I feel that I am receiving all possible help in my effort to make good.
This is a wonderful Course and as each new Lesson is received a greater interest in it is maintained.
7th *January*, 1950. *V. S., STROUD.*

. . During my enforced convalescence, I read and re-read your lessons, noted your remarks on my work and took them very much to heart. This did me quite a lot of good and I feel perhaps you would like to know that since my return to the writing world I have sold four short stories in as many weeks—the buyer—Amalgamated Press.
There is not a vestige of doubt that your candid, and sometimes scathing criticisms did me untold good.
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1st *May*, 1950. *J. A.*

. . . My article THE WRITING ON THE WALL was printed in the *Sunday Mail* during March. Many thanks for your great help.
22nd *April*, 1950. *J. A. M., PAISLEY.*

You can, if you wish, quote me as selling a story after only one lesson . . . In conclusion I would say it is to be regretted that I did not read of your School sooner . . . I have learned quite a lot even at this stage.
28th *March*, 1950. *J. O., LIVERPOOL.*

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ARGOSY

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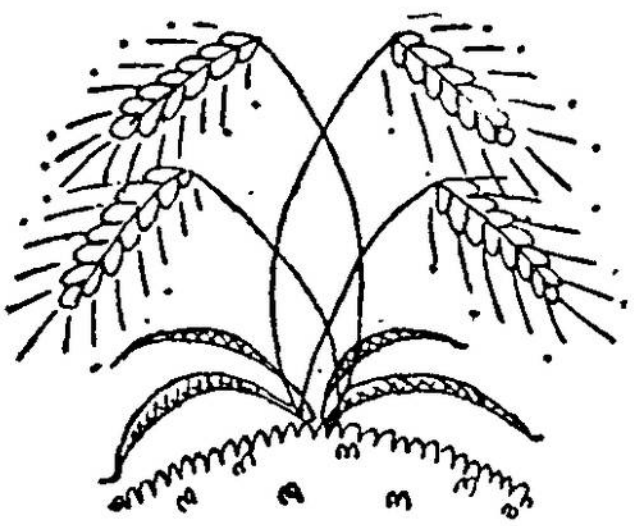
Rondel

THE loaded sheaves are harvested,
The sheep are in the stubbled fold,
The tale of labour crowned is told.

The wizard of the year has spread
A glory over wood and wold,
The loaded sheaves are harvested,
The sheep are in the stubbled fold.

The yellow apples and the red
Bear down the boughs, the hazels hold
No more their fruit in cups of gold.
The loaded sheaves are harvested,
The sheep are in the stubbled fold,
The tale of labour crowned is told.

JOHN DRINKWATER, 1882-1937



VILLAGE PANTHER

It looked like the perfect accident

by DAVID WALKER

HENRY BLUNDELL was reading the two day old papers. It was still too hot on the verandah to concentrate very much. He read idly and let his mind wander, then read again in a flitting butterfly manner which would have surprised those who knew Henry Blundell only in his work.

Blundell was on ten days leave now, and so could allow himself the indulgence of idleness ; but even if his mind were lazy in the heat, his eyes were watchful, admiring his young wife, who looked so graceful in the other chair, seeing the stillness of the forest beyond the resthouse garden, seeing the evening sun on the brown hills. It was early summer in the Indian plains, a time of dust storms and parching heat, with the relief of the monsoon still far away.

Cheddi Khan came round the corner of the verandah, his bare feet padding quietly on the cement floor. He stopped a little distance from Blundell's chair. Cheddi Khan was fat and elderly and dignified, as befitted the bearer of a District Commissioner. He waited, not hovering as is the way of young bearers, but calmly, with an air of unassailable patience.

" Hello, Cheddi Khan," said Blundell.

" Sahib, men have come."

" What men ? "

" Villagers, Sahib." Cheddi Khan spoke with a certain disparagement. " They have brought news of a panther in the village."

" But you know I don't bother with village panthers."

" *Huzoor*, so I said. But they will not go away. They say that so great a Sahib will surely kill the panther."

" Oh, well, I'd better see them," he said, hardly noticing the flattery. That was a part of the ritual.

At the side of the house, the men were squatting on their heels. They rose when they saw Blundell and salaamed deeply.

" Be seated," he said, using the polite mode of address. They couldn't talk unless they sat. He stood, leaning against the verandah pillar.

The spokesman was elderly. He wore a cleanish khaki jacket above his *dhoti*, and had an air of responsibility. They were all Hindus.

" Sahib," he began, " we have heard many tales of the Sahib's greatness. How he has killed a hundred tigers and protected the poor . . ."

Blundell let him go on for a moment. This was a formality that it would be rude to interrupt too soon. It was almost true about the tigers. He was a famous tiger-shot, though no one would have imagined it from looking at him. At last, he steered the old man gently to the point. " Now, brother," he said, " let us hear of this great and terrible panther."

He spoke jokingly, like an indulgent, slightly crabby uncle. It was a tone of voice you could have heard, in those days, all over the length and breadth of India.

The panther had taken a dog that very afternoon, coming boldly out of the jungle. Not that anyone cared about a dog. But three goats had gone this week, and a calf the other day. They were poor people, and afraid also, thinking the panther would soon take their children. It would certainly come again, at dusk, and if the great Sahib Bahadur would rid them of this fear and burden, they would pray for the Sahib's life-long happiness.

Blundell had tried many times to shoot village panthers. Sometimes he had succeeded, but not often. Their familiarity with man made them cunning as well as bold. However, he knew they were a very real trouble to the villagers and he had nothing to do this evening. It would only be for an hour. Yes, he might as well.

" I will come now," he said. " Have a goat ready."

He went back to tell Lydia. " I shan't be long, darling," he said, and bent to kiss her.

She smiled up at him. " I hope you get it, Henry," she said. Theirs was a happy and placid marriage. He did sometimes think she must be lonely, but she never showed it. She was twenty five, and they had been married for two years.

He got his double barrelled .318 and the long torch that clamped above the barrels, and walked down the dusty village street. The sun was nearly setting, and the evening light was soft, lending a little romance even to that most unromantic scene. The emaciated dogs barked and slunk away ; the children stopped playing to watch him ; women chattered behind the mud walls.

" The *machan* is ready, Sahib," said the elder.

" I'll get up now," he said. " Keep the goat out of sight."

Blundell climbed the rough ladder, tested the string *machan* for strength, then settled himself comfortably. He sat still, with

every muscle relaxed. He could stay like that for an hour if necessary and never move even his lips.

The tree was at the edge of the village, not more than twenty yards from the nearest house. The jungle was in front of him. He could see some distance through the trees, for there was no long grass at that season.

They led out the goat, a half grown kid prancing along playfully on stiff legs. They tied it to a wooden stake and then, talking loudly, went away. "Come for the feast, O Panther!" called a wag, and they all neighed with laughter. Their voices blended into the murmur of the village. The goat had not seen Blundell in the tree, and that was most important. If it saw him, it would not be afraid; and it was necessary that the little animal should show fear.

Blundell watched the darkness falling. For a brief time, just after the sun had gone, there was a magic in the evening light, a mauve radiance that belonged neither to day nor night. After that, night came quickly. There was no sound in the jungle, but behind him the usual village noises were going on. In the distance, the jackals had started their dismal yowling. The smells came to him, too—a dozen smells, human and animal. All these things were so familiar that he was barely aware of them. They were a part of his life, and he liked them.

The young goat began to bleat. At first it only whimpered wistfully. It was standing still, white face showing in the dusk, looking back towards the village. But soon it tugged at the rope, bleating incessantly. There was a world of loneliness and fear in the high, frenzied m-a-a-a-a, but Blundell wasted no sympathy on the goat. He saw it dispassionately, as, indeed, he saw most things in life. He had a love for his work, for the abstract entity of India that was his charge. He had love for Lydia, his wife. But he was a dispassionate man.

He heard a car coming up to the village. It was an unusual time for it to be moving on that out of the way road. The lights flashed for a moment on his tree; then the car bumped past behind him in low gear. The noise of the engine died suddenly beyond the village; and then—just as suddenly—Blundell heard the sound he had been waiting for. It was the lightest rustle from in front. The night was quiet, and he knew something must be moving between the trees. The goat burst into frantic bleating. Almost certainly this was the panther.

He did not have long to wait. Often a panther would watch for an hour, or circle its victim cautiously; but this one was bold. There was no more noise at all until it was close. Then he heard another quiet rustle.

Blundell was calm. His pulse did not quicken. There had been a time when his heart would have thumped, but not now. He was altogether master of himself—one hand at the torch switch, the other holding the pistol grip of the rifle.

The kid gave a final despairing bleat. The noise broke off short, died abruptly. Blundell heard the thin rope snap. But the panther itself made no sound. Blundell pushed on the torch switch and raised the rifle to his shoulder in one movement. The panther had picked up the goat at a run. It was nearly back to cover already —a really big one, ears back, long tail held low. He saw a distinctive dark patch in the middle of its back. The rippling, spotted strength of it showed vividly in the torch beam. The goat hung limply between the panther's jaws.

Blundell fired his shot; even as he pressed the trigger, the panther swung sharply to the left and disappeared behind a tree trunk. He saw a spurt of dust where the bullet had struck. It would have been a perfect shot—if the panther had gone straight . . .

Excited voices drew near. The old man carried a hurricane lantern. " Did you kill it, Sahib ? " he called.

" I missed it," Blundell said calmly. " The panther took the goat at a gallop."

He climbed down from the tree. It was a thing you couldn't help. He made no more excuses. Why should he ? " I will come again," he said. " Salaam." And he walked off up the village street.

The forest resthouse was just beyond the village. He turned into the compound. There were two cars there now. Someone else must have arrived. On the verandah, Lydia and a stranger were sitting in the long-armed wicker chairs. " This is Mr. Lister, Henry," said Lydia.

The man stood up. He was a young fellow, medium sized, but taller than Blundell. " How d'you do, sir," the newcomer said, looking at Blundell with lively interest.

" Did you get the panther, darling ? " Lydia asked.

" I missed him," he said. " I was too slow."

" Did he take the goat on the run ? " said Lister.

Blundell nodded. " Finishing your tour ? " he asked.

" Yes, sir, I've been on the go for six months. I was just telling Mrs. Blundell that I'm going on to Naini from here. I hope I'm not disturbing you by coming to the resthouse."

" No, no, glad to see you," Blundell said. " It'll be nice up at Naini now."

Cheddi Khan came along then with his whisky. It was a good-sized peg, the only drink Blundell allowed himself in the day. He lay back relaxed in a chair. It was still hot, but the sharp edge had

gone out of the heat. The air was so dry that you didn't even sweat, if you kept still. Lydia had changed her dress. She was wearing a green one now—a light, cool silk. She looked ravishing, very much alive.

" I've heard a great deal about your shooting prowess, sir," said Lister eagerly.

Seems a nice fellow, Blundell thought idly. He felt Lister watching him—thinking, perhaps, This little chap doesn't look the great Blundell.

He looked out across the garden. The moon had risen, giving beauty to the jungle, making the scene seem clean and innocent, but mysterious as well. Even the jagged line of the Himalayas was soft. The hills were very remote. It was hard to believe that they existed. And there was the voice of Koel, calling its first melodious Ko-el, and rising in a crescendo, five, six, seven, eight times, then an abrupt silence. It began again, each series of calls a precipice of sharp mounting urgency, a feverish accompaniment to the hot night.

But the others were talking.

" I'm getting three months," Lister said. " Flying home in June."

" What are you going to do ? " said Lydia. Her voice was animated, as if perhaps she were longing to be home herself.

" I'm going gay in London for a while," he said. " Then I'm going home to Ireland. And there's a new Forestry Commission scheme I want to see in Scotland."

" Sounds like a busman's holiday," Blundell said. But that was the sort of thing he liked people to do. Must be a good lad, and on his leave too.

" That'll only take a day or two," said Lister. " Plenty of time for the fleshpots."

" You'll have dinner with us, won't you, Lister ? "

" Yes, I'd be glad to, sir."

Blundell finished his drink. The others went on talking, discussing shows to see, places to dance. He only half listened to them. With the other part of him he heard the night. But in a way he was interested, feeling a little out of it, listening because of that, listening to their young voices, knowing that they still had their youth. You couldn't pretend you thought the same way when you were forty five.

But the envy passed quickly. Henry Blundell had done a lot in his forty five years. Starting with nothing except his brains, with the disadvantage of his dumpy body to overcome ; becoming a famous shot, and not only that but a famous administrator ; seeing the strength of his own character build in the years,

finding a beautiful wife, making a success of that too. Yes, he had a lot to be pleased with.

Cheddi Khan was supervising putting out the beds on the lawn. He did not do such work himself, but he saw that it was done to his satisfaction—the Sahib's bed and the Memsahib's bed side by side on the grass, three feet apart exactly. Blundell watched the moonlit ceremony of it with pleasure.

Then Cheddi Khan came to the verandah. He salaamed Lister in austere silence, saying but not saying, I am the bearer of a great Sahib. " Bath is ready," he said to Blundell.

Blundell left to have his bath.

It was hotter next day. The plain, whitewashed room in which they had their lunch was battened down against the heat, windows and wooden shutters closed. It was a stifling twilight in there. The old fashioned *punkah* creaked across the ceiling and back, across and back. It was a hypnotic thing to watch.

" It's a hundred and twelve," Lister said. " Hot enough to keep us going." He looked spry enough himself, as if he thrived on it.

But Lydia was pale. " I'm going to rest," she said. " What are you doing this afternoon, Henry ? "

" I think I'll go out about four," he said. " Might see something in the jungle. Coming with me ? " He didn't mind the heat much. He was used to it ; but however well used to it you were, you couldn't keep it out of your mind.

" I think that's too early for me, darling. I'm tired." And she sighed. Lydia didn't generally admit to that, but she seemed a little dispirited today.

" I'm going out at five," Lister said. He glanced diffidently at Lydia, at Blundell, at the swaying *punkah*. " If Mrs. Blundell would like to walk then . . . There's a bit of Sal forest I wanted to look at. It's not very far, not over half a mile from here."

Her face brightened for a second. Then she looked tired again. She stood up. She was dressed, as they were, in a khaki shirt and shorts, and she was so slim that the man's clothes suited her. She looked boyish in a way, but with a woman's softness.

" May I let you know later ? " she said.

She was still sleeping, a couple of hours later, when Blundell took the light, single barrelled rifle, slung it on his shoulder, and tiptoed from the room. Outside, he felt the heat burning against his lips. The air was heavy and silent, and the village had not yet awakened from its afternoon torpor.

Blundell was wearing his jungle boots, thin canvas uppers with rubber soles. They made hardly any sound on the brown grass of

the forest road. It was shady between the trees, and a little cooler perhaps. Silence hung over the jungle, grasped it, so that it was hard to believe that there was life.

But Blundell was watchful, doing the thing that he liked best to do, searching the ground for marks, looking between the trees for signs of movement. The jungle was unexpected, unpredictable. It gave him a contrast from the ordered method of his mind and of his work.

He walked slowly, his right hand clasping the rifle sling. He was ready. He did not expect to shoot, but there was always the faint chance that a tiger would come on to the road and stand there for an unhurried moment, looking one way and then the other —master of the jungle.

Soon he came to a wide water-course, now dry, crossed it, and took a narrow path to the left. The jungle was not the jungle that people imagine, not luxuriant, not green, not teeming with snakes. It was brown and dry and you could see for many yards. There were tall trees and smaller thorns. The leaves were the only green things in the jungle, and they looked dull and parched.

In a month all this would change. The cool rains would come and seep into the ground and give it life. Then there would be steam and riotous growth, a swift, almost vicious transformation from brown to green, from bareness to tangled growth. It would be cooler then, but plaguey, with mosquitoes to bring sickness, and beetles and winged white ants to fly round the lamp.

There was still one wet corner of the water hole. Over the rest of it the mud had cracked into a multitude of crisscrossed veins. He looked for tracks—a sambur, a cheetah, jackals, a panther, the massive pug-marks of a tiger. It was cooler now—another day ending, another evening coming to the familiar jungle. The shadows were long.

He had turned back and was nearly home when he reached the *nala.* It was narrow and sandy, dry like all the other water channels of the earth. He stopped a moment before crossing, looking as always for marks, and saw that a panther had been that way.

There was a noise in the jungle beyond. He stayed perfectly still, moving only his eyes to look. He could see nothing close at hand, but over there beyond the thick thorn scrub something moved. His hand tightened on the rifle sling. But it relaxed again and he smiled. It was Lydia he saw, walking with Lister below the tall trees. He started to call to them, but stopped, not knowing quite why.

They were moving slowly along the path, walking side by side, less than a hundred yards away. Lister pointed up to the treetops

and looked down at her. He was laughing. She laughed in reply. There weren't many jokes you could make about trees.

They were quiet again, moving on more slowly, turning often to one another. There was a curious intensity about them, something out of place in a casual stroll through the forest. Blundell decided that he would not call to them. He would wait and watch.

He moved a stealthy foot till he was behind the fork of a tree. He could still see them beyond the clearing. The ground was a little higher over there.

The young man stopped and turned to her, standing a little in front so that she must stop too. They looked at one another. Blundell could see both their profiles, serious and intent. She was wearing a rose dress. It stood out sharply against the sombre jungle colours.

Lister's voice came across to him. " It's wonderful to see you," he said, " to see such a lovely girl after all these months." And he was smiling down at her, not happily, but with trouble, as if he had said it unwillingly.

And Lydia—what would she say? She smiled, not happily either, but making a joke of it. " Thank you, sir," she said, and began to walk again.

But Lister took her hand. " Listen ! " he said jerkily. " Don't laugh it off. I mean it. I can't help it."

" It's absurd," she said. Her voice was quiet. She did not say it convincingly. It was as if she too were held in a grip from which she did not want to be free.

She had turned so that Blundell could see her whole face. Her lips were parted. There was an awareness about her, a soft intentness, that he himself had never seen before.

They sat down then, not very close to one another, leaning back against the same large tree. Lister held a match for her cigarette, and they began to talk, but Blundell could not hear what they said. The voices rose and fell.

He was wondering, formulating plans in his tidy mind. Up to now there had been nothing, but . . .

It was a few minutes later that Lister turned and leaned towards her. He took her hand again.

She spoke more loudly. " I know, Peter," she said. " I know. But it isn't fair to him." She was pleading with Lister, pleading with herself too.

She put her free hand out and touched his cheek. Her hand dropped into her lap again.

He was a good looking boy, Lister; but it was his vitality. Even at this distance Blundell could sense it, the irresistible aliveness of him.

Then, suddenly, Lister took her in his arms, grasping her fiercely.

She tilted her head back, looked at him close, not struggling. His left hand stroked her shoulder and her arm. They kissed.

And while they lost themselves in the first sweet moment of their passion, Blundell began to act. His anger blinded him for a second—a surging anger such as he had not felt for many years. But he mastered it. He was cold again. He had had time to make his plan. He knew exactly what he would do, what was necessary to set his house in order.

The tree fork was at a good height. He turned over the safety catch and took slow aim. The sharpness of the day had faded, but he could still see his sights. Accidents did sometimes happen in the jungle.

Lister was facing him. It was not quite a stationary target, for the boy was moving a little in his kissing. And Blundell had to think about the exact place to aim. He was not used to firing at clothed bodies.

He took the first pressure and held his breath and squeezed.

But even as the echoes of the shot died, a movement caught his eye. Below them, moving from the thick scrub, a tawny streak flashed across the clearing. He had reloaded. He did that automatically whenever he fired.

His mind gave him the right lead, and he fired his second shot. The panther tumbled like a rabbit, head into the ground, body and tail curling over; three graceful somersaults before it quivered and lay dead.

It was a very fine shot, perhaps the best he had ever made. He smiled, seeing what a perfect accident it had become, seeing what good luck had done for him. He did the obvious thing, walked straight over towards the dead panther.

He was halfway there when he heard Lydia's voice. It was high pitched. "Henry! Henry!" she called. "Quick, Henry!"

He turned and ran towards her. He was very light on his feet for such a dumpy little man. "What's wrong, darling?" he shouted.

She was kneeling beside Lister. The boy was ashen pale. His mouth was closed, jaw muscles working. "It was the first shot," she cried, a little calmer already, relief in her voice.

He looked at Lister's right foot. There was a small hole just behind the toecap of the shoe. But the hole underneath was large and the blood was spurting. That was a thing that happened with soft-nosed bullets.

He had to be careful. "I . . . I'm most terribly sorry," he said. "It was the first shot when the panther was in the scrub. I slipped." He knelt beside Lister. "I can't tell you how sorry I am."

Lister looked at him. " Nothing at all," he said, even managing a smile. The look on his face almost apologized for being shot.

Blundell took charge of the situation. " We must get that shoe off," he said.

" Are you sure, darling ? " she said. " Wouldn't it be better to leave it ? "

Lister said nothing.

" No, no," said Blundell decisively. " Risk of infection." He unlaced the shoe, took his clasp knife and made two slits at the heel. Then he turned back the upper and drew the shoe gently from the foot. Lister groaned once.

The bullet hole was where he had hoped, just at the base of the third toe. There was a lot of bleeding.

" Tear a strip from your dress, Lydia," he said. " Bind it up tight. Put on a tourniquet." She knew about those things.

" I'll get men to carry him," he said, and he ran off towards the village.

It was very late when he got back from the hospital. He had driven sixty miles, and he was tired. There was still a light burning in the resthouse. She was waiting for him.

" Why didn't you go to bed, darling ? " he said.

" Why do you think, Henry ? " she said. She flung her arms round his neck and kissed him, clinging to him, crying a little, as if he had been away from her a long time.

" They fixed him up all right," he said. " He's quite comfortable."

She said nothing, but pressed herself closer to him.

He kissed her and leaned his cheek against hers, smiling. Henry Blundell had set his house in order.

* * *

THERE'S METHOD . . .

Have ever you harked to the jackass wild,
Which scientists call the onager ?
It sounds like the laugh of an idiot child,
Or a hepcat on a harmoniger.
But do not sneer at the jackass wild,
There is method in his heehaw,
For with maidenly blush and accent mild
The jenny-ass answers shee-haw.

OGDEN NASH

CUTTING THE CHERRY

The old tree rocked, slightly but perceptibly.
It rocked, but stubbornly it stood

by KENNETH ALLSOP

THE farmer wanted to rid his field of the cherry stump; we wanted wood for the winter. It was a fair deal, and the three of us, Stephen, Peter and myself, set off along the lane with long handled axes, cross-saw, beetle, wedges, sledge hammer and a rope with a breaking strain of two and a quarter tons.

The Michaelmas sun was warm on the skin, and the edges of the oak, elm and beech leaves were stained as if from dabbling in its rosiness. A robin was fluting with loud nostalgia in the hedge. It did not stop as we passed close, continuing to point its beak skywards and squeeze out the long rich whistles. It was standing on a rose sprig hung with the shiny scarlet globules, and the instant impression was of glutinous beads of blood escaping from its raw breast. At the foot of the hedge on the little bank I noticed a tuft of harebells, a blue puddle where the bright sky had leaked.

Some jackdaws went overhead towards the house, yapping like puppies. The daylight mist-chill, which had smelt of mushrooms when I first left the house, had been heated away by the sun, and now there was an illusion of summer. But the air was very still, autumnally ruminative, and the ragged *clack, clack* of iron on iron sounded with ringing clearness from the woodshed.

Crossing the field to the stump, I began to have a secret regret that the tree was to be felled, for I was thinking of the kestrels and owls that must have lived there. It was an old tree. It stood alone in the centre of the meadow, a gnarled finger with a broken brown nail. We dropped the tackle on the grass near a stub of wood, half submerged in brambles and nettles, that had snapped from the top, and walked round the tree prospectively.

From the base, where it was thicker than our three bodies together, to the shattered spire, it reached a full twenty feet. But for a single rickety branch that thrust out suppliantly, and which sucked up enough life to nourish a threadbare shawl of fine toothed leaves, the trunk was naked.

It must have been a fine, strong tree at its full height, before the superstructure of boughs, with their bunches of pallid pink

blossom, died and fell away, leaving only the grooved pillar.

It was rotten at the heart. Three or four holes gaped in the horny bark where branches had dropped from their sockets. There, the wood was brown as congealed blood, foxy as it was termed locally. The stump looked bound to stagger back before the first powerful wind and fall. Surely, the slicing blows of the axes, the drive of the saw, would be even more devastatingly decisive.

That line of thought was jerked to a stop by the discovery of a wound unlike the branch cavities. On the flank a few feet above ground there was a criss-cross pattern of scars. Evidently somebody else had been here with a similar idea.

Someone's axe had gashed the tree about, had clawed out a patch of bark so that the underlying pinkness was exposed, but had not got much deeper. There was exhaustion and loss of direction written in those rough jags. The axe had been leaned on, the tree glared at, then the person had rummaged round in the grass for kindling that the wind had felled . . .

Well, the stump might be tougher than it looked, but our approach was not in the half hearted spirit of our predecessor. Nor did we intend to waste that solid weight of wood bunched in the base by cutting three feet from the ground. We were claiming it all.

There were two main root spurs, each a solid buttress, anchoring the stump hard. These should be the first to be cut, thus severing the cherry's last complete hold. Stephen began with the axe, making downward, inward, slanting drop blows that sent sharp, hard little chips shooting through the air. One struck me on the arm and stung like a flint. I picked it up and fingered it. The chip was fibrous and hard, sapless, the salmon pink wood ossified into strong, deep grains.

It was my turn with the axe. I straddled in Stephen's stance, feeling the weight and the subtle balance of the axe-head, then letting it glide up with the soft impetus of its own weight.

It was good to feel the axe's dynamic mass, first hanging slack headed during the over-shoulder swing, then flying forwards, suddenly a living force, jumping down and into the wood with an iron exclamation . . . It was good until the arms and wrists missed the cue from the brain, or the eye's guiding line to the right nick got ravelled, and the axe skidded on to the wood like a sparrowhawk botching a strike. Then the blade bounced back with a flat grunt and the vibrations ran through the handle like an electric shock, leaving the bones in the palms numb and aching.

By the time the two main spurs had been severed we were all looking more serious. This was going to be no push-over, in any sense. Stephen and Peter took the cross-saw and poised it low

on the bole. After a few stuttering shunting motions, the teeth began to slice and the blade became a piston of dull blue light.

I sat on the end of the fallen top-knot, and watched the break-up of the social systems that had evolved within the hide of this cherry that stood where three counties touched.

The woodlice were out first; then I watched a brindled spider with hooked hairy legs come scuttling from under a ridge of bark. It stopped, sidled on an inch, then squatted on a wart-like excrescence, while its thick capsular body dithered to the rhythm of the saw. The woodlice wove round the spider, helplessly scurrying up one groove and down the next. The spider sat stilly, meditatively, while the orange wood-dust spurted about it.

The spider looked stunned by the catastrophe. It made a tiny movement, an impulsive flicker of a leg. I saw that descending the stump away from the widening pink grin where the saw was working in, was a dowdy insect with a stout, gross little body. It was this that the spider was watching . . .

The saw *harrhed* and *hurrhed* like a December gale, and the cherry quivered faintly as in a gale. The tick laboriously fled down the escarpment of the collar, away from the roar and rattle of danger. The spider stockily waited.

For a doubtful moment I thought I was wrong, that the tick would pass to safety. There was a swift kicking movement and the tick had disappeared beneath the spider's spread body. The whiskered legs carved . . . The wood powder floated in soft puffs, and efficiently the spider parcelled up the tick.

At that moment I felt a prick on my wrist and, scrambling across my arm, glossily golden as a blob of amber, was an ant. As I flicked it off I saw that the shimmer of ant bodies upon the top-knot was like running resin. Obviously I was causing consternation in the nest beneath the log.

I jumped up and began to chop and drag away the skeins of bramble with the pick. The top-knot could go as it was back to the house for splitting. I was glad to be moving again, for I had been getting cold.

By the time Michael arrived the cherry had been undercut. The two claws were snipped and the saw had made a circular incision round the collar. The theory was that with a rope slung about the top, the rest would be merely a matter of concentrated weight. Stephen climbed up and draped the rope round the trunk.

At a shouted signal everyone threw himself upon the rope. The rope swivelled about, jerking in abrupt little arcs, but the cherry barely budged. The rope was tightened, and we all jumped on again. After another tighten and pull the rope was abandoned,

and everyone walked up to the cherry. There was much peering and poking and discussion. The saw began rasping once more.

I sat where I had fallen from the rope, wondering what was keeping the stump up. It looked rotten as soddened cork; it was hollow; the tough rind had been almost completely cut through; it shook and grunted at each tug, and it didn't come down.

With a noise like a tin of stones a magpie hopped the lane hedge and, followed by two more, wavered across the field. That made eleven I had seen since breakfast within a few hundred yards of the house. And not long ago the magpie had been almost extinct in this border country of Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire.

I began thinking of the good things there would be to do in the spring—so many things, alluring across the grey plain of winter, that at close quarters would seem less important than a dozen other matters clamouring for attention. They would be postponed and dodged, and another spring would have passed.

A shout from Peter prevented me from growing more melancholy. He explained that the saw would cut no deeper. The stump was still gripping tenaciously with roots that could not be reached and was sitting hard on the inner rim. Its hold, however, had been loosened still more, so first we'd have another swing on the rope. If that didn't work, a tractor was the next line of attack.

We marshalled ourselves in a straggling line while Peter again tightened the rope. With less vigour than before we threw on our combined weight. This time the cherry rocked, slightly but perceptibly. It rocked, but stubbornly it stood.

No more time was wasted. Stephen strode off to the farmhouse. I shared a cigarette with Charles and then we began to load the top-knot and other scattered chunks on to the cart. We had just got it loaded when the farmer's son brought the tractor.

It was a cheering sight as it came throbbing across the field with the last peaky rays of the swamped sun gleaming on the blue engine cowling. The rope was freed from the elm and the tractor's tow-pin dropped through its looped end. In first gear John eased forwards until the rope was taut. There was a moment's pause in which the chant of a coal tit could be heard, then the throttle opened and the tractor set itself against the strain. For a second it seemed to hesitate while the engine hammered; there was a grunt and a shudder from the stump, and the rope snapped and coiled back like a striking snake.

This time the rope was wound thrice round the trunk and the tractor moved off, taking up the slack in another direction to test for weakness. Again it edged forwards, while the rope stretched

tremulously. The engine throbbed and roared, and the big steel-lugged wheels jerked round in inches.

There was a second when it seemed that anything might happen, when movement of stump, rope and tractor was suspended. Then the stump gave a lurch, the ground round it heaved, and with a slow, splintering groan the cherry heeled over upon its side.

We gathered round. The tree had broken off low, at ground level, but on one side it had dragged out its roots with it, long stiff tentacles that dripped damp mould. The cross-sawing had helped considerably. It was there that the trunk had surrendered. Long gouts of the rocky looking red wood had been torn out from the stem and smaller sharp spars bristled round the gape. The stump had been lain low and now the real job was beginning, the cutting.

Only Stephen and I turned up in the afternoon. First we snedded away the single living bough and then we cross-sawed. We sat either side of the trunk and were soon working to a steady rhythm, feeling through the sliding saw the shift of weight and the pull of the other's body. But the saw would not go through. When the top was down to bark level the blade began to jam and stall, before it was deep enough to pin in a wedge above it.

We axed and sawed again. The stump was hard to work, lacking the pliant submissiveness of living wood and cutting was tiring. The teeth grated against tough fibres as if against seams of concrete and the blade was not oiled by sap.

While we cut, I wondered how long the erosion of wind and rain and the dynamiting effect of frost would have taken to demolish the cherry. How many winters would it have needed to crack that iron structure ? The longer we sawed, the more remote seemed the answers.

At last the tangled hinges of the roots were severed and the battered top cut off. There was left the long horny barrel of the main trunk, too wide, too grizzled, too contorted with knots for the saw. We began to split. The first wedge was poised at the top in the very centre of the trunk where the bark had flaked.

At each heavy blow the wedge jerked in another fraction, until half its length was buried in the reluctantly yielding wood. Another, with a broken head, was jammed to the side of the first wedge, and knocked level, then a third. And the three, making a single wide wedge, were driven down, at first with a persistence that seemed unequal to the rigid resistance of the wood, but after a score of blows with quickly increasing depth into a crooked crimson vein that began to wriggle down the trunk.

Now each fresh plunge of the sledge was widening the gap. More wedges were thrust in at intervals and hammered until their heads were flush.

And each blow was now followed by a sullen crackle that continued for a few seconds after the wedge had been struck, a creaking and a groaning from the heart of the trunk that was sweet to the ears. The cherry was breaking.

The end came with a loud crunching report and softly the trunk sagged open. A kick, and it fell wide apart, revealing the torn, ragged core of the tree, red within as a human limb but for a long hollow where the wood was a dark colour. This was the chamber to which the branch-sockets had led, and it held a mass of short black twigs, the remnants of a jackdaw's nest.

We stood back, leaning on hammer and axe, and looked at the dismembered tree, at the shambles of trampled bramble and nettles around, and at the chips of pink wood that littered the grass.

Then I saw within the raw cavern something stuck upright upon a little rough shelf. I stepped closer and saw that what for a moment I had thought to be a dead leaf was a sleeping butterfly. Its wings were closed above its body, held flatly tight as hands in prayer, and it did not move when I touched it with my finger.

I dislodged it and bore it upwards in the palm of my hand. Still it slept in the deep unconsciousness of hibernation. I blew upon it gently, and after a few seconds its wings fluttered vaguely, revealing the brilliant whorls of colour that mark the peacock.

For a while the butterfly sat in my hand, weakly flickering those glowing wings, then abruptly fluttered up. Briefly it flew, aimlessly, dazedly, until suddenly an agitation and strength entered its flight, and it began to fly in quick, tumbling circles like a lapwing about its invaded territory. It drew a wavering fiery trail about the felled cherry—a flimsy living segment broken free from the deadness of the tree. For nearly four minutes it flew in this way, then branched away and, climbing steeply, was lost from sight in the greyish auburn-flecked greenness of the elm's top branches.

We turned away, and in the rapidly fading light began loading the handcart for the last journey back to the house.

* * *

QUORUM

God bless me and me wife,
Me son John and his wife,
Us four :
No more !

A Wessex Prayer

★*If you would sleep soft, unwary reader, or after a page or two, drift into sleep, this is not the tale for you. Turn on, we beg, for here is no bedtime story, but a sombre witching tale, to haunt the uneasy pillow and conjure spirits from every shadowed corner.*

THE ILLUSTRATED MAN

by RAY BRADBURY

"HEY, the illustrated Man!"

A steam whistle screamed, and Mr. William Philippus Phelps stood, arms folded, high on the summer night platform, a crowd unto himself.

He was an entire civilization. In the North Country, his chest, the Vasties lived—nipple eyed dragons swirling over his fleshy breasts. His navel was the mouth of a slit eyed monster—an obscene, insucked mouth, toothless as a witch. And there were secret caves where Darklings lurked, his armpits, adrip with slow subterranean liquors, where the Darklings, eyes jealously ablaze, peered out through rank creeper and hanging vine.

Mr. William Philippus Phelps leered down from his freak platform with a thousand peacock eyes. Across the sawdust covered meadow he saw his wife, Lisabeth, far away, ripping tickets in half, staring at the silver belt buckles of passing men.

Mr. William Philippus Phelps' hands were tattooed roses. Now the roses shrivelled, as with the passing of sunlight.

A year before, when he had led Lisabeth to the registry office to watch her write her name in ink, slowly, on the form, his skin had been white and clean. He glanced down at himself in sudden horror. Now he was like a great painted canvas, shaken in the night wind! How had it happened? Where had it all begun?

It had started with the arguments, and then his fatness, and then the pictures. They had fought deep into the summer nights, she like a brass trumpet forever blaring at him. And he had gone out to eat five thousand steaming hot sausages, ten million rissoles, and a forest of fried onions, and to drink vast red seas of orange juice. Peppermints formed his brontosaur bones, the rissoles shaped his balloon flesh, and strawberryade pumped in and out of his heart valves sickeningly, until he weighed nearly twenty one stone.

"William Philippus Phelps," Lisabeth said to him in the eleventh month of their marriage, "you're dumb and fat."

That was the day the boss of the fair handed him a month's wages. "Sorry, Phelps. You're no good to me with all that fat on you."

"Wasn't I always your best tent man, boss?"

"Once. Not any more. Now you sit, you don't get the work done."

"Let me be your Fat Man."

"I *got* a Fat Man. They're a penny a dozen." The boss eyed him up and down. "Tell you what, though. We ain't had a Tattooed Man since Gallery Smith died last year . . ."

That had been a month ago. Four short weeks. From someone he had learned of a tattoo artist far out in the rolling country, an old woman, they said, who knew her trade. If he took the cart track and turned right at the river and then left . . .

He had walked out across a yellow meadow, which was crisp from the sun. Red poppies blew and bent in the wind as he walked, and he came to the old shack, which looked as if it had stood in a million rains.

Inside the door was a silent, bare room, and in the centre of the bare room sat an ancient woman.

Her eyes were stitched with red resin thread. Her nose was sealed with black wax-twine. Her ears were sewn, too, as if a darning needle dragonfly had stitched all her senses shut. She sat, not moving, in the empty room. Dust lay in a yellow flour all about, unfootprinted in many weeks; if she had moved it would have shown, but she had not moved. Her hands touched each other like thin, rusted instruments. Her feet were naked and obscene as galoshes, and near them sat vials of tattoo milk—red, lightning blue, brown, cat yellow. She was a thing sewn tight into whispers and silence.

Only her mouth moved, unsewn, "Come in. Sit down. I'm lonely here."

He did not obey.

"You came for the pictures," she said in a high voice. "I have a picture to show you, first."

She tapped a blind finger to her thrust out palm. "See!" she cried.

It was a tattoo portrait of William Philippus Phelps.

"Me!" he said.

Her cry stopped him at the door. "Don't run."

He held to the edges of the door, his back to her. "That's me, that's me on your hand!"

"It's been there fifty years." She stroked it like a cat, over and over.

He turned. "It's an *old* tattoo." He drew slowly nearer. He edged forward and bent to blink at it. He put out a trembling finger to brush the picture. "Old. That's impossible! You don't know *me.* I don't know *you.* Your eyes, all sewn shut."

"I've been waiting for you," she said. "And many people." She displayed her arms and legs, like the spindles of an antique chair. "I have pictures on me of people who have already come here to see me. And there are other pictures of other people who are coming to see me in the next one hundred years. And you, you have come."

"How do you know it's me? You can't see!"

"You *feel* like the lions, the elephants, and the tigers, to me. Unbutton your shirt. You need me. Don't be afraid. My needles are as clean as a doctor's fingers. When I'm finished with illustrating you, I'll wait for someone else to walk out here and find me.

"And some day, a hundred summers from now, perhaps, I'll just go and lie down in the forest under some white mushrooms, and in the spring you won't find anything but a small blue cornflower . . ."

He began to unbutton his sleeves.

"I know the Deep Past and the Clear Present and the even Deeper Future," she whispered, eyes knotted into blindness, face lifted to this unseen man. "It is on my flesh. I will paint it on yours, too. You will be the only *real* Illustrated Man in the universe. I'll give you special pictures you will never forget. Pictures of the Future on your skin."

She pricked him with a needle.

He ran back to the fair that night in a drunken terror and elation. Oh, how quickly the old dust-witch had stitched him with colour and design. At the end of a long afternoon of being bitten by a silver snake, his body was alive with portraiture. He looked as if he had dropped and been crushed between the steel rollers of a printing press, and come out like an incredible rotogravure. He was clothed in a garment of trolls and scarlet dinosaurs.

"Look!" he cried to Lisabeth. She glanced up from her dressing table as he tore his shirt away. He stood in the naked bulb-light of their caravan, expanding his impossible chest. Here, the Tremblies, half maiden, half goat, leaping when his biceps flexed. Here, the Country of Lost Souls, his chins. In so many accordion pleats of fat, numerous small scorpions, beetles, and mice were crushed, held, hid, darting into view, vanishing, as he raised or lowered his chins.

"Good heavens!" cried Lisabeth. "My husband's a freak."

She ran from the caravan and he was left alone to pose before the mirror. Why had he done it? To have a job, yes, but, most of all, to cover the fat that had larded itself impossibly over his bones. To hide the fat under a layer of colour and fantasy, to hide it from his wife, but most of all from himself.

He thought of the old woman's last words. She had needled him two *special* tattoos, one on his chest, another for his back, which she would not let him see. She covered each with cloth and sticking plaster.

"You are not to look at these two," she had said.

"Why?"

"Later, you may look. The Future is in these pictures. You can't look now or it may spoil them. They are not quite finished. I put ink on your flesh and the sweat of you forms the rest of the picture, the Future—your sweat and your thought."

Her empty mouth grinned. "Next Saturday night, you may advertise! The Big Unveiling! Come see the Illustrated Man unveil his picture! You can make money in that way. You can charge admission to the Unveiling, like to an Art Gallery.

"Tell them you have a picture that even *you* never have seen, that *nobody* has seen yet. The most unusual picture ever painted. Almost alive. And it tells the Future. Roll the drums and blow the trumpets. And you can stand there and unveil at the Big Unveiling."

"That's a good idea," he said.

"But only unveil the picture on your chest," she said. "That is first. You must save the picture on your back, under the sticking plaster, for the following week. Understand?"

"How much do I owe you?"

"Nothing," she said. "If you walk with these pictures on you, I will be repaid with my own satisfaction. I will sit here for the next two weeks and think how clever my pictures are, for I make them to fit each man himself and what is inside him. Now, walk out of this house and never come back. Goodbye."

"Hey! The Big Unveiling!"

The red signs blew in the night wind: *NO ORDINARY TATTOOED MAN! THIS ONE IS "ILLUSTRATED" GREATER THAN MICHELANGELO! TONIGHT! ADMISSION ONE SHILLING!*

Now the hour had come. Saturday night, the crowd stirring their animal feet in the hot sawdust.

"In one minute—" the boss pointed his cardboard megaphone—"in the tent immediately to my rear, we will unveil the Mysterious Portrait upon the Illustrated Man's chest! Next Saturday night,

the same hour, same place, we'll unveil the Picture upon the Illustrated Man's *back!* Bring your friends!"

There was a stuttering roll of drums.

Mr. William Philippus Phelps jumped back and vanished; the crowd poured into the tent, and, once inside, found him re-established upon another platform, the band brassing out a jazz tune.

He looked for his wife and saw her, lost in the crowd, like a stranger, come to watch a freakish thing, a look of contemptuous curiosity upon her face. For, after all, he was her husband, and this was a thing she didn't know about him herself. It gave him a feeling of great height and warmness and light to find himself the centre of the jangling universe, the fair world, for one night. Even the other freaks—the Skeleton, the Seal Boy, the Yoga, the Magician, and the Balloon—were scattered through the crowd.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the great moment!"

A trumpet flourish, a hum of drumsticks on tight cowhide.

Mr. William Philippus Phelps let his cape fall. Dinosaurs, trolls, and half women half snakes writhed on his skin in the stark light.

Ah, murmured the crowd, for surely there had never been a tattooed man like this! The beast eyes seemed to take red fire and blue fire, blinking and twisting. The roses on his fingers seemed to expel a sweet pink bouquet. The tyrannosaurus-rex reared up along his leg, and the sound of the brass trumpet in the hot tent heavens was a prehistoric cry from the red monster throat.

Mr. William Philippus Phelps was a museum jolted to life. Fish swam in seas of electric blue ink. Fountains sparkled under yellow suns. Ancient buildings stood in meadows of harvest wheat. Rockets burned across spaces of muscle and flesh. The slightest inhalation of his breath threatened to make chaos of the entire printed universe. He seemed afire, the creatures flinching from the flame, drawing back from the great heat of his pride, as he expanded under the audience's rapt contemplation.

The boss laid his fingers on the sticking plaster. The audience rushed forward, silent in the oven vastness of the night tent.

"You ain't seen nothing yet!" he cried.

The plaster ripped free.

There was an instant in which nothing happened. An instant in which the Illustrated Man thought that the Unveiling was a terrible and irrevocable failure.

But then the audience gave a low moan.

The boss of the fair drew back, his eyes fixed.

Far out at the edge of the crowd, a woman, after a moment, began to cry, began to sob, and did not stop.

Slowly, the Illustrated Man looked down at his naked chest and stomach.

The thing that he saw made the roses on his hand discolour and die. All of his creatures seemed to wither, turn inwards, shrivel with the arctic coldness that pumped from his heart outwards to freeze and destroy them. He stood trembling. His hands floated up to touch that incredible picture, which lived, moved and shivered with life. It was like gazing into a small room, seeing a glimpse of someone else's life, so intimate, so impossible that one could not stand long to watch without turning away.

It was a picture of his wife, Lisabeth, and himself.

And he was killing her.

Before the eyes of a thousand people in a dark tent in the centre of a black forested land, he was killing his wife.

His great flowered hands were upon her throat, and her face was turning dark, and he killed her and he killed her and did not ever in the next minute stop killing her. It was real. While the crowd watched, she died, and he turned very sick. He was about to fall straight down into the crowd. The tent whirled like a monster batwing, flapping grotesquely. The last thing he heard was a woman, sobbing, far out on the shore of the silent crowd.

And the crying woman was Lisabeth, his wife.

In the night, his bed was moist with perspiration. The carnival sounds melted away, and his wife, in her own bed, was quiet now, too. He fumbled with his chest. The sticking plaster was smooth. They had made him put it back.

He had fainted. When he revived, the fair boss had yelled at him, " Why didn't you *say* what that picture was like ? "

" I didn't know, I didn't," said the Illustrated Man.

" Holy Mackerel ! " said the boss. " Scare the life out of everyone. Scared the life out of Lizzie, out of me. Anyway, where'd you get that damn tattoo ? " He shuddered.

His wife stood over him.

" I'm sorry, Lisabeth," he said, weakly, his eyes closed. " I didn't know."

" You did it on purpose," she said. " To scare me."

" I'm sorry."

" Either it goes or I go," she said.

" Lisabeth."

" You heard me. That picture comes off or I leave this show."

" Yes, Phil," said the boss. " That's how it is."

" Did you lose money ? Did the crowd demand refunds ? "

" It ain't the money, Phil. For that matter, once the word

got round, hundreds of people wanted to come in. But I'm runnin' a clean show. That tattoo comes off! Was this your idea of a practical joke, Phil?"

He turned in the warm bed. No, not a joke. Not a joke at all. He had been as terrified as anyone. Not a joke. That little old dust-witch, what had she *done* to him and how had she done it? Had she put the picture there? No; she had said that the picture was unfinished, and that he himself, with his thoughts and his perspiration, would finish it. Well, he had done the job all right.

But what, if anything, was the significance? He didn't want to kill anyone. He didn't want to kill Lisabeth. Why should such a silly picture burn here on his flesh in the dark?

He crawled his fingers softly, cautiously down to touch the quivering place where the hidden portrait lay. He pressed tight, and the temperature of that spot was enormous. He could almost feel that little evil picture killing and killing all through the night.

I don't wish to kill her, he thought, insistently, looking over at her bed. And then, five minutes later, he whispered aloud: "Or *do* I?"

"What?" she cried, awake.

"Nothing," he said, after a pause. "Go to sleep."

The man bent forward, a buzzing instrument in his hand. "This costs two pounds an inch. Costs more to peel tattoos off than put 'em on. Right, rip off the plaster."

The Illustrated Man obeyed.

The skin man sat back. "Gosh! No wonder you want that off! That's ghastly. *I* don't even want to look at it." He flicked his machine. "Ready? This won't hurt."

The boss of the fair stood in the tent flap, watching. After five minutes, the skin man changed the instrument head, cursing. Ten minutes later he scraped his chair back and scratched his head. Half an hour later he got up, told Mr. William Philippus Phelps to dress, and packed his instruments.

"Wait a minute," said the boss. "You ain't done the job."

"And I'm not going to," said the skin man.

"I'm paying good money. What's wrong?"

"Nothing, except that damn picture just won't come off. The thing must go right down to the bone."

"You're crazy."

"Mister, I've been in business thirty years and never seen a tattoo like this. An inch deep, if it's anything."

"But I've got to get it off!" cried the Illustrated Man.

The skin man shook his head. "Only one way to get rid of that."

"How?"

"Take a knife and cut off your chest. You won't live long, but the picture'll be gone."

"Come back here!"

But the skin man walked away.

They could hear the big Monday night crowd, waiting.

"That's a big crowd," said the Illustrated Man.

"But they ain't going to see what they came to see," said the carnival boss. "You ain't going out there, except with the plaster on. Hold still now, I'm curious about this *other* picture, on your back. We might be able to give 'em an Unveiling on *this* one."

"She said it wouldn't be ready for a week or so. The old woman said it would take time to set, to make a pattern."

There was a soft ripping as the boss pulled aside a flap of white tape on the Illustrated Man's spine.

"What do you see?" gasped Mr. Phelps, bent over.

The boss replaced the tape. "Phelps, as a Tattooed Man, you're a washout! Why'd you let that old woman decorate you?"

"I didn't know who she was."

"She certainly cheated you on this one. No design to it. Nothing. No picture at all."

"It'll come clear. You wait and see."

The boss laughed. "Right, I'll wait. Come on. We'll show the crowd part of you, anyway."

They walked out into an explosion of brassy music.

He stood monstrous in the middle of the night, putting out his hands like a blind man to balance himself in a world now tilted, now rushing, now threatening to spin him over and down into the mirror before which he raised his hands.

Upon the flat, dimly lighted table top were peroxides, acids, silver razors, and squares of sandpaper. He took each of them in turn. He soaked the vicious tattoo upon his chest, he scraped at it. He worked steadily for an hour.

He was aware, suddenly, that someone stood in the caravan door behind him. It was three in the morning. There was a faint odour of beer. She had come home from town.

He did not turn. "Lisabeth?" he said.

"You'd better get rid of it," she said, watching his hands move the sandpaper. She stepped inside the caravan.

"I didn't want the picture to be like this," he said.

"You did," she said. "You planned it."

"I didn't."

"I know you," she sneered. "Oh, I know you hate me. Well, that's nothing. I hate you. I've hated you for a long time now.

Goodness, when you started putting on weight and fat, d'you think anyone could love you then? I could teach you some things about hate. Why don't you ask me?"

"Leave me alone," he said.

"In front of that crowd, making a spectacle out of me!"

"I didn't know what was under the plaster."

She walked round the table, hands fitted to her hips, talking to the beds, the walls, the table, talking it all out of her. And he thought: Or did I know? Who made this picture, me or the witch? Who formed it? How? Do I really want her dead? No! And yet . . .

He watched his wife draw nearer, nearer, he saw the ropy strings of her throat vibrate to her shouting. This and this and *this* was wrong with him! That and that and *that* was unspeakable about him! He was a liar, a schemer, a fat, lazy, ugly man, a child. Did he think he could compete with the boss? Did he think he was sylphine and graceful, did he think he was a framed El Greco? Da Vinci! or Michelangelo! She brayed. She showed her teeth.

"Well, you can't scare me into staying with someone I don't want touching me with their slobby paws!" she finished, triumphantly.

"Lisabeth," he said.

"Don't Lisabeth me!" she shrieked. "I know your plan. You had that picture put on to scare me. You thought I wouldn't *dare* leave you. Well!"

"Next Saturday night, the Second Unveiling," he said. "You'll be proud of me."

"Proud! You're silly and pitiful. You're like a whale. Did you ever see a beached whale? I saw one when I was young. They came and shot it. Some coastguards shot it. You, a whale!"

"Lisabeth."

"I'm leaving, that's all, and getting a divorce."

"Don't."

"And I'm marrying a man, not a fat woman—that's what you are, so much fat on you there isn't any sex!"

"You can't leave me," he said.

"Just watch!"

"I love you," he said.

"Oh," she said. "Go look at your pictures."

He reached out.

"Keep your hands off," she cried.

"Lisabeth."

"Don't come near. You turn my stomach."

"Lisabeth."

All the eyes of his body seemed to fire, all the snakes to move,

all the monsters to seethe, all the mouths to widen and rage. He moved towards her—not like a man, but a crowd.

He felt the great blooded reservoir of orangeade pump through him now, pulse in sickening sweet anger through his wrists, his legs, his heart. All of it, the oceans of mustard and relish and all the million drinks he had drowned himself in in the last year were aboil; his face was the colour of a steamed beef. And the pink roses of his hand became those hungry, carnivorous flowers kept long years in tepid jungle and now let free to find their way on the night air before him.

He gathered her to him, like a great beast gathering in a struggling animal. It was a frantic gesture of love, quickening and demanding, which, as she struggled, hardened to another thing. She beat and clawed at the picture on his chest.

"You've got to love me, Lisabeth."

"Let go!" she screamed. She beat at the picture that burned under her fists. She slashed at it with her fingernails.

"Oh, Lisabeth," he said, his hands moving up her arms.

"I'll scream," she said, seeing his eyes.

"Lisabeth." The hands moved up to her shoulders, to her neck. "Don't go away."

"Help!" she screamed. Blood ran from his chest.

He put his fingers about her neck and squeezed.

She was a steam whistle cut in mid-shriek.

Outside, the grass rustled. There was the sound of running feet.

Mr. William Philippus Phelps opened the caravan door.

They were waiting for him. Skeleton, Midget, Balloon, Yoga, Electra, Popeye, Seal Boy. The freaks, waiting in the middle of the night, in the dry grass.

He walked towards them. He moved with a feeling that he must get away; these people would understand nothing; they were not thinking people. And because he did not flee, because he only walked, balanced, stunned, between the tents, slowly, the freaks moved to let him pass. They watched him, because their watching guaranteed that he would not escape.

He walked out across the black meadow, moths fluttering in his face. He walked steadily as long as he was visible, not knowing where he was going. They watched him go, and then they turned to the silent caravan together and pushed the door slowly wide . . .

The Illustrated Man walked steadily in the dry meadows beyond the town.

"He went that way!" a faint voice cried. Torches and lanterns bobbled over the hills. There were dim shapes, running.

Mr. William Philippus Phelps waved to them. He was tired. He wanted only to be found now. He was tired of running away.

"There he is!" The torches changed direction. "Come on! We'll get the bastard!"

When it was time, the Illustrated Man ran again. He was careful to run slowly. He deliberately fell down twice. Looking back, he saw the tent stakes they held in their hands.

He ran towards a street lamp on a far crossroads, where all the summer night seemed to gather; merry-go-rounds of fireflies whirling, crickets moving their song towards that light, everything rushing, as if by some midnight attraction, towards that one high-hung lamp—the Illustrated Man first, the others close at his heels.

As he reached the light and passed a few yards under and beyond it, he did not need to look back. On the road ahead, in silhouette, he saw the upraised tent stakes sweep violently up, up, and then *down!*

A minute passed.

In the country ravines, the crickets sang.

The freaks stood over the sprawled Illustrated Man, holding their tent stakes loosely.

Finally they rolled him over. Blood ran from his mouth.

They ripped the sticking plaster from his back. They stared down for a long moment at the freshly revealed picture. Someone whispered. Someone else swore, softly. The Thin Man pushed back and walked away and was sick. Another and another of the freaks stared, their mouths trembling, and moved away, leaving the Illustrated Man on the deserted road, in a pool of blood.

In the dim light, the unveiled Illustration was easily seen.

It showed a crowd of freaks bending over a dying fat man on a dark and lonely road, looking at a tattoo on his back which illustrated a crowd of freaks bending over a dying fat man on a . . .

* * *

CHECK!

In his younger days Mr. Winston Churchill grew a handsome moustache. But at one of his meetings a lady in the audience took exception to it.

"I don't like your ideas, or your moustache!" she shouted angrily.

"Pray don't distress yourself, madam," replied the great man, suavely. "*You* are unlikely to come into contact with either."

TABLE TALK

There is no love sincerer than the love of food

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, *Man and Superman*

I do not know who it was, in ancient days, who wished for a gullet lengthened out like a goose's neck, so that he might taste for a longer space of time what he devoured . . .

MICHEL MONTAIGNE, 1533-1592, *Essays*

Brothers

Timid roach, why be so shy ?
We are brothers, thou and I.
In the midnight, like thyself,
I explore the pantry shelf !

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY, *Nursery Rhymes for the Tender-Hearted*

Mixed Grill

" The person I would most like to tell what I think of him," said Lady Fielding, " is the butcher. He has a horrid foxy look and wraps up one's disgusting bit of meat before one can see what it is . . ."

" Is it grey pork with water oozing out of it this week ? " said Mrs. Birkett with animation.

" I almost wish it were," said Lady Fielding. " It is a small cube of magenta beef, very hard, with all the fat cut off."

" Mrs. Carter," said Robin . . . " got what everyone thought was very nasty mutton, till it turned out to be uneatable veal. When I think of Heaven I think of a very thick piece of bleeding steak, well grilled on the outside."

" Oh, *Robin !* " said Anne, raising her large dark eyes to his in a kind of reverent ecstacy.

" Kidneys, with a little pool of their own gravy in their cupped hands," said Mr. Birkett, whom no one had thought capable of such a sustained poetic flight.

" The conversation does somehow always get round to food," said Lady Fielding, " and I feel one oughtn't to . . ."

A determined attempt was then made by the whole party to talk of books, or pictures, or music, but it was a complete failure. Books boiled down to cookery books ; pictures appeared to be

associated in most people's minds with a vast canvas of a ham, a lobster, a brace of teal, a flask of wine, a cheese with lifelike grubs on it, fresh strawberries with a giant ladybird, and a dead stag thrown carelessly across the lot, while the thought of a small French masterpiece of two *œufs sur le plat* produced a reverent hush. As for music, Anne said boldly that music always made her hungry . . .

ANGELA THIRKELL, *Peace Breaks Out*

Consolation

O glotonye, ful of cursednesse !
O cause first of oure confusioun !
O original of oure damnacioun . . .
O, wiste a man how manye maladyes
Folwen of excesse and of glotonyes,
He wolde been the moore mesurable
Of his diete, sittynge at his table.

GEOFFREY CHAUCER, 1340-1400, *The Pardoner's Tale*

Table d'Hote

Everybody was assembled in the big dining room. Dinner was ready. Here was the soup. It was a plain gravy soup. There was nothing to stir the fancy in that. One could have seen through the transparent liquid any pattern that there might have been on the plate itself. But there was no pattern. The plate was plain. Next came beef with its attendant greens and potatoes—a homely trinity, suggesting the rumps of cattle in a muddy market, and sprouts curled and yellowed at the edge, and bargaining and cheapening, and women with string bags on Monday morning . . .

Prunes and custard followed. And if anyone complains that prunes, even when mitigated by custard, are an uncharitable vegetable—fruit they are not—stringy as a miser's heart . . . he should reflect that there are people whose charity embraces even the prune. Biscuits and cheese came next, and here the water jug was liberally passed round, for it is in the nature of biscuits to be dry, and these were biscuits to the core. That was all. The meal was over . . .

VIRGINIA WOOLF, 1882-1941, *A Room of One's Own*

The Higher Calling

" Very well," cried I, " that's a good girl ; I find you are perfectly qualified for making converts, and so go help your mother to make the gooseberry pie."

OLIVER GOLDSMITH, 1730-1774, *The Vicar of Wakefield*

Testimonial

He was a man
Of an unbounded stomach, ever ranking
Himself with princes . . .

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Henry VIII*

Vice—

All diets, according to my understanding, are wrong . . . No sooner had I made a beginning on the diet books than I discovered that the most recent school of diet thought believes nearly every disease in the world to be not only the result of eating improper foods, but also the result of eating proper foods in improper combinations . . .

For many years I have been partial to large sirloin steaks, preferably those about three inches thick, which have been broiled nine minutes on each side over hot coals.

Such a sirloin steak, accompanied by a mealy baked potato, a plateful of buttered toast, and a lettuce salad thoroughly moistened with a garlic perfumed dressing composed of two parts oil and one part claret vinegar, has always struck me as one of civilization's noblest products, especially when followed by a flaky fragment of apple pie tasting of cinnamon . . .

A casual glance into the pages of the most recently published diet book was enough . . . Beefsteak is a protein. A baked potato is a starch. The combination is dreadful. Buttered toast is largely starch, and therefore makes the terribleness more pronounced. Claret vinegar is an acid : to eat an acid with a protein is almost suicidal. As for the apple pie, it contains starch in its crust and sugar in its stuffing ; and to drop those ingredients on top of steak and potatoes is little different from touching a match to a celluloid collar . . .

These books aroused me as few other books have been able to do. Although I seemed reasonably healthy, I knew I couldn't be . . . It was all too clear to me that I was in a bad way.

KENNETH ROBERTS, *For Authors Only*

—Versa

Dr. Newton, now parson of Rosse in Herefordshire, told me that . . . when his stomach is out of order, he cures himselfe by eating a piece of hott roast beefe off the spitt.

JOHN AUBREY, 1626-1697, *Brief Lives : John Newton*

MITZI AND MILLSTONES

A girl of character was Miss Malone
—make no mistake about it!

by JAMES MARTIN YOUNG

"THE method with millstones," cried Ivan the axé-thrower, "is to drop them in the ocean!"

"And supposing," I said, "that as they sink, you find they're still tied to your neck?"

"Scotch Hannah," he admitted glumly, "has a point, there."

So, after days and nights of talk, not one of us in Marco's circus had a workable idea about how to unravel the tangle in which Mitzi Malone had got herself mixed up.

It began, as I well remember, when she was only six years old. We had given the season's last performance under the big top at Marseilles, and retired to winter quarters on a farm close by Chateau Duvin in the hills south of Gardanne. Most of the artists had scattered. Mitzi's father, Bud Malone the trick cyclist, had taken an eight weeks engagement on the Parisian stage. He was devoted to his child, but her birth had cost the life of Elsa, his wife, and something broke in Bud at that time. We knew that during his stay in the capital he would let himself go—drink, women and every debauchery, yet find consolation in none of them.

He left Mitzi to make her home with me in the living end of the wardrobe caravan. She was as big a parcel of bother and nuisance as anything of the size I've ever met, but you couldn't help liking her. There was a merry radiance about her that had more to it than brown eyes and black locks and a robust and bouncing prettiness. Even at that age, Mitzi was a girl of character.

In no time, of course, the little mischief was up and over the high boundary wall of the chateau grounds. Thought I to myself: Aye, young Madam, you'll soon be turfed out of there!

It was the home of the fabulously wealthy Paul Santot, head of the great chemical business, and we of the circus were scarcely on his visiting list! But bless me if she didn't come back with the news that she had had tea with the seven year old son and heir, Emil, and had been invited to play with him any time she liked. That was Mitzi—just plain lovable.

A week later—she had been at the chateau every day—she was with Emil in the courtyard, and he was taking her for a make-believe ride in the family limousine, when a man with a hideous scar above and below the empty socket of his left eye sneaked out from the shrubbery and sprang into the car. He was gone in a flash with the children. The car was found abandoned in Marseilles within an hour, but of Mitzi and Emil no trace could be discovered.

It was small relief to us to know that the Santot boy was the real object of the kidnapping. Twice his father received grubby notes demanding a huge ransom. Twice he went to the rendezvous, the second time without telling the police, but no one appeared.

Nine days of frantic search brought no news.

On the tenth morning, at three a.m., a pair of astonished *gendarmes* on patrol in a Marseilles slum were approached by a dirty but resolute looking little girl who was leading by the hand a boy in a state of abject terror.

"My name," she said briskly, "is Mitzi Malone, and here is Emil Santot. He lives at Chateau Duvin, near Gardanne, and I live close by. I regret that we are lost. Will you kindly help us to get home?"

Within minutes Emil, screaming, was being bundled into a police car, and they were going to put Mitzi in after him when she turned to the group of chattering *gendarmerie*.

"Emil had better go back to his mother," she said. "But as for me—should I not show you where to find the man who took us away?"

Calmly she led them through a maze of back streets, and halted at the open door of a filthy smelling cellar.

"No, he has not flown," she assured them. "I promise that you will find him here, in bed. An exceedingly bad man."

"You slipped away," they asked, "while the rascal slept?"

"Not quite so easily! Each night he loaded a tray with broken bottles and thrust the edge of it in the crack above the door. The smallest touch brought it clattering down and woke him. The third time I tried, I really did think he would burn my eyes out with the red-hot poker with which he was constantly threatening us. How utterly imbecile I was, when we might have escaped the first night!"

"What did you do then, little one?"

"Why," Mitzi shrugged, "this same poker. Naturally it was not pleasant, but what have you? He is a wicked man. While he slept, I hit him over the head, as hard as I could. See, there he lies!"

Yes, surely a child of character!

She came gaily back to us, and after a meal, a scrub and a rest she was off to one of her favourite games. She had a long rope fixed high in the central one of three tall trees. With the other end

looped round her middle she would swoop down in graceful flight from one of the outer trees up to a perch in the third tree, calling : " See ! I'm a bird ! "

" Why doesn't Emil come ? " she kept asking. " We had planned a special game for the day of our return. He is to bring his popgun and try to shoot me with the cork as I fly."

But unlike our sunny Mitzi, the boy had not skipped easily back to normality. News came to us that he was very ill, attended by specialists from London, Paris, Zurich. That red-hot poker which the disfigured monster had never actually jabbed into his eyes had bored into his mind. He was living an unending nightmare, unable to rest or sleep. They feared for his sanity, even for his life. I tried to explain some of this to the impatient Mitzi.

" But how absurd ! " she said. " I can make him sleep, easily ! "

" When Europe's greatest doctors have failed ? " I snorted.

" I succeeded each night, in the cellar."

That, after all, was an argument. Besides, she was a demon for having her own way. If I hadn't taken her to the chateau, she'd just have gone alone.

I sent up a message to Madame Santot, and the great lady herself came down to see us. She was a real aristocrat, tall, stately, fragile. She had been a famous beauty, but her looks were ravaged then by anxiety. Her nerves were in pieces, and it was easy to guess how her only child had come by his highly strung nature. She was only too ready to snatch at Mitzi's offer.

" Come upstairs ! " she said. " If the doctors object, I'll turn them out. They're useless, useless ! Oh, my son ! Oh, my baby ! "

There were three doctors in Emil's room, and two nurses. The boy, ghastly white, lay moaning pitifully and making defensive passes with his hands. Mitzi ran to his bed.

" I'm here, Emil ! Now, what nonsense is this ? " she said.

" Mitzi ! Mitzi ! " He turned towards her, sobbing without tears, groping at her. " Don't let him do it ! Stop him ! My eyes . . . "

" Silly, you have nothing to fear ! " As if oblivious of us all she kicked off her shoes and slipped under the bedclothes beside him. " Let my arm come round you—so. Press close against me ! "

He clung to her, burying his face in her fluffy black hair.

" I'll defend you," she said. " You're safe, quite safe, with me. Close your eyes and sleep, darling. Sleep, dear. Sleep . . . Emil . . . "

We watched, awed. In a few minutes the tortured boy slid into a deep and healing sleep. His mother began to cry hysterically, and with an imperious gesture Mitzi waved her and the rest of us out of the room. We obeyed, too—even the doctors. She remained

in Emil's bedroom, patiently nursing him, for a round of the clock, and through the rest of that winter she spent far more time at Chateau Duvin than she did with us. Emil recovered his health—but no one, I'm sure, could have guessed that Mitzi had acquired a millstone.

Spring, and in our blood the itch to be on the road again. The Santots wanted to heap Mitzi with gifts—the daintiest clothes, and costly toys like a rocking horse and a huge pedal-car.

"Truly," she told them, "dresses which would spoil at a touch are only an inconvenience to me, and in our wagons there is no room for such immense playthings. I am happier without them."

Excited as any of us, she scrambled up beside her pouchy-eyed and repentant-looking father on the step of their caravan, and we were off.

But Mitzi hadn't finished with the Santots.

We were setting up the big top in Cadillac in the high summer when out of the blue Paul Santot dropped amongst us, sent by his frantic wife. At their dinner-table, he explained, a spike of flame coloured lupin had fallen from a vase, close to Emil's face.

"He is stricken down again and calling for Mitzi. I have a plane waiting at Bordeaux. Our gratitude will be boundless . . ."

I keep a log of the circus events, and I notice that in the ten years until she was sixteen Mitzi was summoned to Chateau Duvin twenty times. Whenever some symbol of the red-hot poker plunged Emil back into the horror of the cellar she would drop everything and go to him. She had protected and comforted him when it was actual, and she never failed to charm the illusion out of him.

Except for those disordered spells, Emil was a most attractive boy. He was intelligent, kind hearted, gracious ; a shade too serious for a youngster, but bright enough when he got started. Mitzi was very fond of him, and the Santots naturally adored her. They did a lot for her, too. If her contact with them made no change in her nature, it certainly put a style and a polish on her that she could never have picked up in the hurly-burly of the showgrounds. Each winter they took her travelling with them—Egypt, South Africa, Algiers, once to America. She tasted life on the millionaire scale. They clothed her, and taught her the ways of a young lady of fashion. While she was with them she was like their own daughter.

But although they pleaded with her again and again to go and live with them for good, back she always came from the playgrounds of the world. "Not everyone has the fortune to be of a circus," she would say.

Flicking over the pages of my log, I've stopped at the point where she reached sixteen. A crisis blew up then for Mitzi.

Again we had just moved into winter quarters. The Santots had planned, that year, to take Mitzi to Italy, but before they were ready to start, Marco, with myself at his elbow, went through the usual end-of-season ceremony. The artists, one by one, came to his van. I handed over the money due to them, and to most Marco gave a glance and said : " Till spring, Carl," or " In the spring then, Ivan." It was a contract for the year to come.

Bud Malone entered, uneasily, guiltily. He had muffed some part of his turn every night for weeks. He was cracking up, and little wonder. I gave him his money, and he looked at the Boss.

" Good luck, Bud," was all Marco said.

Bud winced. Then, with a lift of his chin : " 'Bye, Marco."

He had been with us nineteen years. He had once been good.

Mitzi must have been listening. She came into the caravan at once.

" So my Papa is not required next year, Marco ? "

" It is necessary, occasionally, to introduce new blood."

" Naturally," Mitzi said. " In the new season, then, I shall be ready at last with an act for you."

" I take it you are thinking of a trapeze act," Marco said. " You have some agility, Mitzi, despite your spells of indulgence with your wealthy friends. But so far, watching you practice, I have not seen that you are of the first rank in the high top. Real competence requires unbroken effort in the early years."

" My training has suffered interruptions," Mitzi shrugged. " Nevertheless I shall have an act. It requires two other artists."

" Three to pay ! " Marco shouted. " I am not Monsieur Santot ! "

" My partners will be inexpensive," Mitzi said. " You remember Julien Dafoe, of the Grunberger show which we saw in Paris ? "

" That cheese-mite ! He became mad with jealousy of his own brother and dropped the girl who acted with them. She died . . ."

" She was a slut," Mitzi said. " And Julien will be cheap. The other also. See ! "

She produced a show business magazine with one advertisement pencil-ringed. It read : *Midget lady, height only eighty centimetres, desperate employment any kind.*

" What the devil kind of act . . ." Marco began.

" Does it not touch even you," Mitzi asked, " a midget—you know their pride—admitting that she is desperate ? I am moved, Marco. But I see, also the makings of an excellent act."

" Which rehearses itself," said Marco, " while you play in Italy ! "

"My friends must play without me, this time. They have harassed me for years, wanting to give me things, and at last I can please them! In their absence they can let us three practise our act in the banqueting hall at Chateau Duvin." She turned to me. "Scotch Hannah, you will co-operate in the matter of three costumes, simple but original? I can help myself to certain ropes while our surly Boss looks the other way. Then I need only a very large egg."

"An egg!" I said.

"Big enough to contain a desperate midget, height only eighty centimetres. And this, Hannah. You will use your influence with Marco to keep a place in the programme until my act has been considered? He is, after all, your husband. You will talk to him?"

I talked to Marco, and Mitzi summoned Julien Dafoe and the midget. Heavens, but they were an unpromising pair! Julien had been a popular and accomplished trapeze artist, but he had committed the deadliest sin of his profession. He had the surly slouch, the suspicious eye, the twisted mouth of the pariah. On hearing that he was being offered work in the high top, he was emphatic.

"Not for me," he said. "I carry infection. I tell you before my friends rush with the news—I lost my head, killed my partner."

"Stifle your self-pity and consider yourself engaged," said Mitzi. "Being infectious you can't haggle for big money, and as to the risk—I'm prepared to take it."

Fifi d'Erlanger, the midget, was like a doll that had been left out in the weather. Her blonde hair was stringy. Her cheap clothes were tattered. Her wee lean face was gaunt with hunger, and she had lost the last flicker of midget cockiness. Fifi had fallen out with the rest of a travelling troupe which ran a side-show at the fairs, and desperate was indeed the word for her. But the idea of a trapeze act appalled her. She dissolved in tiny tears.

"For only my bread," she said, "I'd give myself body and soul. But I have no head for heights. I should faint. I should die!"

"You'll survive," said Mitzi. "We start work in the morning."

Somehow she talked those two into it. They practised throughout the winter, and it was on the day of the Santots' return from Italy that we all went to the chateau to view the new act.

The banqueting hall at Chateau Duvin is a great vaulted chamber, lit by four glorious stained-glass windows and hung with priceless pictures and tapestries. Mitzi had fixed various ropes and two trapezes to the beams, and also a high, swinging platform. On the cleared floor, cut into lengths and heaped in apparent carelessness, was yards and yards of pale grey chiffon.

We were a raggle-taggle lot to be invading that noble house, and

I wondered uneasily what its owners thought of all this. Paul Santot came in with his wife. He looked complacent and amused, as if no action of Mitzi's could offend him, but she bore the air of nervous flutter and flurry that had grown habitual with her over the years. She darted about the hall, glancing this way and that, as if looking for something. Finally she pounced upon Frieda, wife of Carl Olsen the lion-tamer. Frieda had a red feather in her hat.

"Please take it off! Remove it! Hide it!" Madame Santot said. "My son . . . you understand . . ."

Yes, we all understood. The lady spent half her life going ahead of Emil, rooting out and removing anything that might strike his eye as a symbol of a red-hot poker. At any new hotel they visited she would pay to have the gardens ruthlessly sheared of certain flowers and replanted with others. She would have articles taken out of the windows of shops that Emil might pass, and changes made in houses where they were to call. She lived in perpetual dread of missing something that would bring on one of his attacks, and every now and then she would be prostrated with self-reproach because she had overlooked some item.

When Frieda's feather was safely concealed, she called Emil in. At seventeen he was tall, lean, and handsome; a smiling, lovable lad. He came to sit by Marco and me, eager to see the act and very sure that as it was Mitzi's it would be superb.

Mitzi came tripping out from a corner she had curtained off, with the set-faced Julien behind her. They were in the costumes she and I had worked on—one-piece suits of blue-black stockinet with white panels at the breast and a touch of rust-red at the throat. They had silken wings, and stiff felt tails. All I knew about the act was that it was called *Les Hirondelles*, and I prided myself that I'd made them really look like a pair of human swallows.

Which ever way the verdict went, it was a big moment for Mitzi. If Marco approved, her future was in the circus. If he didn't, then she and Bud would travel with us no more—and that, I thought, most likely meant that she would go to the Santots for keeps and have everything that money could buy tossed freely into her lap. It didn't look like much of a tragedy, either way!

There was no sign of Fifi at first. Mitzi and Julien climbed to the beams, and started with an aerial ballet on the two trapezes, ending in a catch and a mid-air kiss—the courtship of the swallows.

"Beautiful! Exquisite!" Emil enthused. "Such grace!"

The next phase was nest-building—Mitzi's old trick of the three trees put to use. With ropes fixed to waist-belts she and Julien skimmed down to snatch pieces of the grey chiffon and carry them to the little platform. The last piece hid the huge egg. As Mitzi and Julien bore it aloft I heard it mutter a small but fervent :

"*Oh, la! Oh, mon Dieu!*"

That, I assumed, was not part of the turn!

While hen-swallow brooded the egg, cock-swallow entertained her with an excellent solo act on the trapeze. Then we saw the baby swallow, incredibly dainty, and not shamming at all as it teetered terrified on the edge of the platform with the mother bird urging it to fly. Mitzi caught a rope with one hand and Fifi's tiny fist with the other and made a beautiful descent, swinging round and round in widening circles, easing herself down inch by inch, the midget seeming to fly by her side.

I never had a moment's doubt. None of us had. What Mitzi lacked in acrobatic skill was more than made up by the charm of the whole conception. The act was a thing of loveliness and meaning; a hit, all the way through. It was enchanting.

Mitzi ran to the Boss. "Your opinion then, you grudging one?"

"That," he grunted, "can be expressed on the posters."

His twirling black moustache seemed to have an extra springiness. His dark eyes gleamed. Marco knew a good thing when he saw it!

"So!" said Mitzi. "Then there will be one more costume, Hannah. A clown's. I think a Harlequin, rather than a Charlot."

"What now?" Marco demanded. "The act passes as it stands."

"My Papa will be so much happier with a part—and after all, an artist of my quality may pull a string for a relative. No?"

"You're a little witch!" said Marco.

We crowded round her, excited, delighted. Fifi, for all her fear of heights, was strutting like a vest-pocket princess. Even Julien looked soberly pleased. Emil, flushed with pride and affection, stammered words of praise. It was minutes before anyone noticed the sounds of broken, unrestrained crying. Madame Santot was in her husband's arms, helpless, hysterical.

"I hate it! I can't bear it!" she was crying. "Mitzi will be killed, and then what of Emil? Paul, plead with her! Take her from this horrible circus for ever! She'll be destroyed . . ."

Mitzi was very gentle with her, but still very firm. She had never been in doubt over her choice. The circus was her life.

"But Emil!" the woman sobbed. "If he needs you . . ."

"Emil," Mitzi said quietly, "is also part of my life, and it will never be inconvenient for me to come to him, no matter where I am."

She glanced defiantly at Marco, forewarning him that at times she might be absent from the show. The Boss made no protest. He understood that he could not have Mitzi without her millstone.

The beauty-loving French public adored *Les Hirondelles*. It

was a brilliant success from the first showing, and for the next four years was one of the high spots of our programme. The midget became so self-important that I used to tell her she'd go pop if she puffed herself up any more. Julien remained detached and almost unsociable, and as for Bud . . . well, he wasn't much of a clown.

Mitzi, for those three, was the king-pin of the universe. They almost worshipped her. When she was called away to Emil and we and the crowds had to do without *Les Hirondelles* for a few days, they mooned around like creatures whose being had lost its meaning.

Four seasons, and we were yet again on our two year circuit, to our southern winter quarters. Mitzi was twenty, and in full bloom. She was undoubtedly attractive—not only pretty but in some way radiant, so that you couldn't be in her company without feeling warmed and enlivened. She had enjoyed the best of two worlds. She could play the lady of society as easily as the star of the ring, and in both rôles she was supremely herself.

We had hardly settled when she was busy fixing her rope on the middle tree of the three where her act had begun. She wanted to improve a detail in the way she landed on the swinging platform.

She was perched in the boughs when Emil appeared, eager as always to see her. With him was another young man ; a big, husky sandy-haired young man with great arms and shoulders and a broad tanned face.

As they passed under the trees Mitzi swooped, snatched the stranger's hat, and was back in the branches before he knew what had happened.

So she introduced herself to Ian Wilcox, of Edinburgh. His father, like Emil's, was head of a great chemical business. He was over to negotiate for the British rights of some new plastic compound. The three came to have a chat with us and a look at the animals, and afterwards the men took Mitzi back to the chateau.

" What d'you make of him ? " I asked the Boss as they departed.

" His ancestors," Marco fumed, " were swineherds and harlots ! "

" You think so too ? The coming of the end of *Les Hirondelles* ? "

It was as obvious as that—something between Mitzi and the young Scotsman ; something immediate and electric. In fact, we learned later that Ian airmailed a letter to his father that very night, announcing exuberantly that he had met the girl he meant to marry. The news brought Old Man Wilcox dashing south by plane and storming amongst us to the rescue of his son. He and Ian and Mitzi had a half-hour session in the Malones' van.

When the elder Wilcox came out I heard him rasp at his son : " If you let Mitzi slip through your fingers, you're disowned ! "

As soon as I got Mitzi alone I asked her: "Is the young man to be robbed of his inheritance?"

The look on her pretty face was solemn and troubled. She glanced towards the barn door, where Bud was idly knotting a bit of string; over to the big tent where little Fifi, curiously subdued, was talking to a very glum Julien; across to the chimneys of the chateau.

"It is a matter for grave thought," she said.

For the first time, our merry Mitzi was feeling the weight of her millstones.

Ian could afford only a fortnight more in France, and the pair of them lived through it as if those were their last days on earth. I know! I know! I once felt that way about Marco. They were enchanted. They were absorbed, oblivious. They weren't walking on common earth.

Mitzi flung herself into the rapture of being in love with as much zest as she had always given to everything, but I was one of the few who knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that when Ian had to go, she wouldn't vanish with him. In her person, in her caravan home, in her act and her whole way of living, Mitzi had always been a tidy person. I just didn't see her walking out and leaving such a mess behind.

They had their fortnight. It was punctuated by half a dozen frenzied visits from Madame Santot, brokenly forecasting what would happen to Emil if Mitzi were so heartless as to go to Scotland. It was marked by the daily sight of Bud and Julien and Fifi, each looking as if the end of the world were imminent. Mitzi cared for those three, and for Emil, but anyone had only to look at her to know that nothing, no ties, no thought of yesterday or tomorrow, was so much as touching the entire perfection of each brilliant today.

Then it finished. Ian went home. He left no ring on Mitzi's finger. He left only a new look on Mitzi's face—a tension, a remoteness, a sudden solemnity where gaiety had always been, and a silence. It was then that we began, those of us who valued her without depending on her, talking angrily about millstones and how to deal with them.

"Drop them in the ocean!" said Ivan the axe-thrower. "And what better spot than mid-Channel?"

"But supposing," I said, "they're still tied to your neck?"

One day with this new, this shut-in Mitzi I went shopping in the village. In the grassy square by the church we came upon Bud Malone standing on his head playing a harmonica to a group of children.

"The little ones adore him, and he them," I remarked.

Mitzi did not answer. She looked graver than ever.

" Better for him to waste his time so than in the *bistro*," I said.

Not a word from her. But it was the same evening, in the big tent, that she came out of her shell.

I think even Marco was feeling a strain when he asked her in his gruff way : " Have you considered the future, Mitzi ? Are we to have *Les Hirondelles* on our programme next season ? "

She gazed at him, and then thoughtfully at the rest of us, and as her glance caught mine for a moment I had a sudden odd vision of six year old Mitzi saying so briskly : " Why, this same poker . . . I hit him over the head, hard as I could . . ."

" I have been considering a number of things," she said.

" For example ? " Marco asked.

" This, then. It occurs to me that a man who can balance on his head should surely be able to stand on his own feet."

" It seems logical," Marco agreed. " But what . . ."

" My Papa is a better clown outside the ring than in it. Wherever we go he delights the street-urchins with his tricks. Might we not witness the same enthusiasm in the show ? "

Bud Malone squirmed. He had let himself sink into a fuddled indifference, content to live on Mitzi. She did not rub it in. She changed to another subject.

" A further thought ! I am neither the only trapeze girl in the world, nor by any means the best. In our act Julien shows true skill—and Fifi, who is the least important, gains most applause. A dozen girls could be found to play my part."

" I'll perform with no one else," Julien snapped out.

" There are other men," said Mitzi.

" Nor I ! " cried Fifi. " My terror ! If you knew . . ."

" Also, there are other midgets," said Mitzi crisply. " I have decided to renounce my own part, but it would be stupid to kill *Les Hirondelles*. The act must remain—with one new artist, or three."

Straight hitting, for sure ! In a minute she had Fifi spluttering like a firework, declaring that no other midget would ever appear in her part.

Bud and Julien had nothing to say, but it was plain that their brains were as busy as their tongues were idle.

" You're going to Scotland, then ? " Marco asked.

" What of Emil ? " Ivan the axe-thrower said.

" That," Mitzi mused, " is another matter. One may part from one's friends. But one doesn't desert them."

And all of us—I think perhaps especially Fifi and Bud and Julien—found ourselves wishing fervently that we could discover a decent let-out for her from her obligations to Emil. We couldn't see it. We couldn't suggest a thing.

Again, that winter, Mitzi backed out of a holiday with the Santots—a Mediterranean cruise. They cancelled it altogether, and Madame gave all her energy to trying to keep Mitzi in France.

"We should be entirely happy," she told Mitzi once, "to see you as Emil's wife. After all . . . the affection between you . . ."

"Marry him!" she cried. "But Emil is my brother!"

"Your brother! Then why not let us adopt you at last, so that in truth you can be his sister?"

"I happen to have a father of my own . . ."

"A father who would be infinitely more at ease if you would allow us to present you with the valley farm, and an income sufficient for all your needs!"

But Mitzi was not to be tempted—nor, if only Madame Santot could have been sure of it, had she any intention of letting Emil down.

Marco had engaged a gifted young Swiss girl, Jeanne, and Julien was persuaded to begin rehearsing with her. Mitzi divided her time between teaching Jeanne her technique, prodding Bud to practise clowning, and visiting the chateau. From Edinburgh, every day, came letters, telegrams, presents, each one of them a token of a lover's urgency.

Mitzi wrote to him twice a week, and went about her life with no outward sign of her inner conflict beyond a permanent new seriousness in her eyes.

On a certain afternoon, ten days before we were due to reopen, as usual, at Aix, Mitzi did some shopping for me in Marseilles. I wanted several things from a shop where they sell every type of theatrical prop. She came back laden; dumped an assortment of parcels down on my van table, and picked one out.

"This," she said, "is my own."

It was wrapped in the same paper and tied with the same printed tape as the others, and I asked her, just casually: "What are you buying from there, if you're out of the show?"

"You'd wonder!" Mitzi said.

I looked at her. I saw it at once. I can't describe it, but there was a difference about her. Her eyes were serious still, and yet there was a hint of the old sparkle. Quite evidently Mitzi had something on her mind.

She went to her father's caravan with a quick, sprightly walk, and shortly afterwards she and a puzzled looking Bud set off together, away into the woods. They did the same thing several times during the next few days. Each time, tucked under Mitzi's arm, was the mysterious parcel.

On the eve of our departure for Aix, Marco was in my van checking over a list of equipment when Mitzi came in.

"Boss," she said, "*Les Hirondelles* is essentially my act. That is undeniable. You are acquiring a valuable property there. It is only right that I should be paid for what I created."

"Paid?" Marco was on the defensive at once. We Scots are said to be canny with our cash, but I've never known a tighter hand than Marco's on the purse-strings. That's how we've survived.

"I'll settle," Mitzi said, "for two things. First, a couple of the best seats, front row, for the opening performance at Aix."

"That!" Marco gave a deep laugh. "So you're only teasing, naughty one! I might consider allowing them at half price!"

"In addition," Mitzi told him, "I want five minutes—perhaps even ten—of the performing time. For this one occasion only, say just following *Les Hirondelles*. I want it for my own purposes, without question, whether or not it upsets the balance of the show."

The Boss is an absolute stickler over timing in the show. It must run with a relentless momentum from first act to last, with not a second wasted. Mitzi would say nothing of her intentions—but he liked her, and it was true that she had presented him with a first class turn.

"Unwillingly," he grumbled. "But as it is you . . ."

"You're an angel, Marco! I wonder that even Scotch Hannah can be indifferent to your charms!"

The minx went bouncing away to Chateau Duvin—as usual scaling the wall at the nearest point, instead of going to the gate.

We travelled to Aix, and set up the tent, and suffered and enjoyed again all the agonies and delights of our rebirth in a new season. Just as the band struck up for the opening, Mitzi entered with Emil Santot and they took their places among the spectators.

It was odd, very odd, to see her there—a smart young lady, faultlessly dressed, who looked as if she could have no possible connection with the hurly-burly behind the scenes. I felt tight about the throat as I thought of our Mitzi being no longer part of the show.

Emil looked happy and expectant. For once he had escaped from his fussy mother's apron strings. She had not even come fidgeting along on an advance visit to make sure there was nothing that might start one of Emil's attacks. She evidently trusted Mitzi as she did no other person.

The show went on—Marco with the liberty horses; Ivan flinging his axes; Boy Pedro trick-riding beautifully on Prince; briefly, in the intervals between acts, Bud and Koko the clowns. Bud had improved himself beyond recognition, and I was glad. You don't like to see the old hands drop out.

Les Hirondelles . . . and with all respect to Mitzi, it was no whit the worse without her. As always, Fifi got the biggest applause

for her descent—and didn't she lap it up! It was plain to see that she meant to be the leader of the trio now Mitzi was out of it.

And now—the next minutes were Mitzi's. I watched her, wondering. I saw no sign of anything out of the ordinary. The instant *Les Hirondelles* was out of the ring Koko came tumbling into it. He was carrying the bladder on a stick that was Bud's usual weapon.

He pointed to it gleefully, indicating that he had stolen it from his fellow clown. He made a show of hiding it about his baggy clothes; a shape of fighting for it.

Bud came roaring in, a tiger of clownish rage, and made a rush at Koko—brandishing a new weapon. It was a red-hot poker, a property-maker's masterpiece in red-hot pokers—a ferocious implement, more real than reality itself. The handle was a shiny brass tube, and the fiery end, lit up from within by an electric battery, was of some flexible stuff stretched over a spiral spring. It gleamed a fierce orange-red, dusted over with sparkling silvery specks, and when Bud caught up with Koko and thrust it at his back it gave off a puff of smoke as it seemed to sink in for a good nine inches.

Of course, my first thought was to turn and stare at Emil. Wide-mouthed, round-eyed, he was gaping at the fearsome thing, his handsome features frozen in a look of amazement and utter horror. Beside him, tense and flushed, sat Mitzi. I saw her grope for his hand and grip it, like a big sister for whose little brother the lions had been just a shade too much.

I had a sudden thought that if Madame Santot had been present, she'd have been in hysterics.

The clowns had a roistering, rollicking fight, putting in every kind of roll and tumble known to the ring. Koko grabbed the red end of the poker, and howled, and rushed to squirt soda-water on his fingers. Bud fell over his own feet and when he picked himself up the poker had vanished . . . and smoke was coming out of the seat of his pants. The children in the crowd kept up a continuous shrill squeal as Bud hurled himself about with an energy I hadn't seen him show in a dozen years and finally, along with yard upon yard of shirt-tail in all the colours of the rainbow, brought the poker to light again.

I caught sight of Marco, standing in the wings. His moustache was curling stiffly. His eyes had a glow. I realized suddenly that here was some brilliant clowning. The crowd was on its feet.

I looked again at Emil. He was still petrified, gazing with a horrible fascination at the symbol which had meant terror uncontrollable to him all through his life. Mitzi, holding his hand, was pale now; pale, but resolved.

The clowns posed for another fight, but before they had struck a blow they chose to become aware of the laughing, screaming audience. They pointed and gesticulated. They held a babbling conference. They charged at the customers.

It's a queer member of a circus crowd who doesn't feel complimented to receive the impudent attentions of the clowns. The compliments certainly flew among the people at Aix that night. Koko dashed wildly about, laying on at heads with his bladder; Bud stabbed and jabbed with his poker, not sparing even the dignified figures in the most expensive seats.

Koko reached Emil and set upon him, whacking him lustily about the head and ears. Mitzi unfastened the brooch she was wearing and stabbed the balloon, which burst with a satisfying pop. Howling and lamenting, Koko signalled to Bud, pointing to the flapping rag of rubber and then to Mitzi, imploring him to take revenge.

Bud roared with laughter. Triumphantly he chased the other clown out, and in elaborate dumb-show, as if it were a bouquet of flowers, he presented his red-hot poker to Mitzi.

The crowd applauded. Mitzi sat for a moment as if quite nonplussed. Then, seeming to enter into the spirit of the thing, she turned the fiery point towards Emil and gave him a tentative poke in the ribs. And Emil smiled.

Emil smiled! I admit it was a pale, uneasy smile. But it was there, and I saw it. I saw Mitzi give a tiny signal, which Bud passed to Marco. The liberty horses pranced in again. The notice of the crowd was diverted to the next act. But some people—and surely I was one of them—kept watching the smart young couple who were left in possession of the clown's red-hot poker.

They examined it together. They switched the light off and on. They squeezed it and made it puff smoke. Once or twice, beaming brightly, Mitzi threatened Emil with it. I'm sure every child under the big top, and not a few of the adults, envied them profoundly.

Every time Mitzi pointed the poker at him, Emil smiled. More and more broadly. More and more naturally. More and more happily, until by the end of the show the pair of them were in a helpless fit of the giggles.

At the finish, Mitzi was seen chasing Emil across the fairground to his car, and they drove off together.

It was long after midnight when Mitzi came back, but we were all waiting for her. We were fond of Mitzi, every one of us. Bud, and Julien, and Fifi—those three, I think, would have died for her. They, more than any of us, were anxious. Afraid to see her slip from amongst us, out of our lives, across to Scotland, to be seen again rarely, if ever.

That, strangely, was our tribute to Mitzi—our passionate desire to bid her goodbye.

She came back in one of the chateau cars, chauffeur-driven. As she came into the big tent she looked tired, but bright.

"So! Am I not an imbecile?" she said.

"Emil?" I asked. "How is he?"

"How is he? Why, in his second childhood! Chasing everyone round the chateau—a veritable clown. Even his mother, in the end, had to cease her lamentations and run. Is it not indeed remarkable, how stupid one can be?"

"No one," said Marco gallantly, "could call our Mitzi stupid!"

"So many years," she mourned, "to understand so simple a thing—that one cannot possibly turn one's back on life and yet look it in the face."

She sat down, glancing amongst us, but especially at the three who had been so close to her.

"I am sad," she said. "Tomorrow, it is goodbye. In the morning I fly to Paris; and then to Edinburgh. Now . . . I . . . I must weep . . ."

And Mitzi wept, and she wasn't the only one. I remember her tears. But I remember, too, her eyes when she had dried them. She was hardly of this earth, was Mitzi that night—looking life in the face.

* * *

DETECTED

John Barrymore and Richard Bennett spent an evening together in London that included liquid refreshments of many descriptions and copious quantity. Bennett woke up the next morning, gingerly felt his head, and wondered if Barrymore had got to his home without bodily injury. He phoned him, and when several minutes passed without an answer, called angrily into the instrument, "Hello! Hello!"

Barrymore's voice, very sleepy, replied, "Hello."

"Are you all right?"

"I'm fine. How are you?"

"Fine. But I've had the devil of a time getting your room. Are you in it, or down in the lobby?"

"I don't know."

"What in hell do you mean, you don't know? Where *are* you then?"

"Here, I suppose," said Barrymore, poking his head out from beneath Bennett's own bed.

Told by BENNETT CERF

THE MASCULINE PRINCIPLE

"I'm not denying anything," he said, "and I'll pay what's fair. But I'll not get married—yet!"

by FRANK O'CONNOR

THE Ryans had a small house on the avenue. The old man was a building contractor in a tiny way of business in Cork; his wife had died ten years before and left him with three daughters, Moll, Fanny, and Brigid—three goddesses! Old Ryan never knew how lucky he was and continued to lament the son he had three times aimed at, but there was hardly a romantic adolescent boy in the neighbourhood who didn't raise his cap to old Ryan as to the priest, partly in reverence, partly in hopes of impressing his spotty visage on the old man's memory, so that one day Ryan would say "Who is that charming chap from St. Joseph's Terrace?" and insist on having him in to tea.

The adolescent boys' mothers were far from sharing that view. If they didn't actually imply that the girls were fast, they made no bones about saying that they were flighty and that old Ryan had only himself to blame, for not having married again—some respectable, horny-handed widow, who would have beaten manners into them. There were altogether too many young fellows around the house for their taste, and, really, the cut of it was a disgrace.

The adolescent boys were horrified and their mothers disillusioned when young Jim Piper got into the clutches of Fanny, the second goddess, or she got into his, according to the way you view it. Neither view would be strictly accurate, for though Fanny shared the family irresponsibility, she had virtues that neither party would have respected, and though Jim might be no Adonis, he was a lad in a thousand.

He was moreover a lad of character, and Fanny couldn't help respecting character. Neither could old Ryan. As a tradesman, he was alarmed at the goings on of his daughters with all sorts of counter-jumpers in sports coats and flannel bags, and it was a real ease to his mind to have one man around the place with whom he could discuss the bonding of brick and the seasoning of timber.

Every week of Jim's life, he brought ten shillings of his wages for

Fanny to lodge in her post office account—another old trades custom that Ryan approved of. The other young fellows who came to the house would have been more likely to touch the girls for ten bob. When Jim and Fanny had two hundred, they were going to start building a house of their own—a real masterpiece, according to old Ryan, who would build it for them.

" You don't know what you're letting yourself in for," Fanny said to Jim. " You may be engaged to me, but you're going to marry my da."

" I might do worse," replied Jim in his stolid way.

" Wait till he comes to live with us," said Fanny. " He's too interested in that house to be healthy."

Then, one Christmas, Fanny went out to do the shopping with the week's household allowance in her purse, ran into some of the the lads in town, and started drinking gin. She kept on saying she had all the money in the house, and she really must go off and do the shopping, but all the Ryans had a great capacity for discussing what they ought to do without doing it.

Coming on to six, Moll, in despair, had to go out and buy what she could locally, on tick. When Fanny came back without the shopping done, Moll screamed at her. Fanny gave her lip, and then Moll smacked her face.

Fanny was a brooding, emotional sort of girl, and she went up to her room and wept floods. Jim came up later that evening, a little bit lit up, but, the sort of fellow Jim was, the more he had taken, the more his sense of justice was roused, and when Fanny tried to make him take sides against Moll, he refused.

" God damn it, girl," he drawled, " be reasonable! Moll has all the responsibility of the house on her, and you sit down there drinking with Mick Leary. Sure, of course the girl was mad! "

Now, character is all very well in its own place, but Jim didn't always know when it was out of place.

" As you're so fond of her, you'd better stick to her," snapped Fanny, getting up to go.

" Oh," said Jim, refusing to be put down by mere temperament, " he'd be a lucky man that'd get her."

" You're not interested in me at all, Jim Piper," said Fanny bitterly. " You're interested in my family, and you're welcome to them."

There was more truth in that than Jim would have been willing to admit, for his own home wasn't all it might have been. Fanny brooded over the quarrel, and the day after the holidays, in the mood of disillusionment that always follows on the Christmas holidays, feeling that there was no one in the world who loved her,

she went to the post office, drew out all Jim's savings—ninety pounds—and took the night boat to London.

Talk about scandal! The general view of the mothers was that Jim had got out of it cheap at ninety pounds. The adolescent boys felt that there was probably another side to the story. The Ryans talked and talked but did nothing, though everyone knew that Fanny had gone to stay with a family called Ronan, who had lived up the road when she was a kid. When her name was mentioned, old Ryan would close his eyes and spread his hands in the attitude of a Christian martyr. His only consolation was Jim Piper, who behaved like a son to him.

One evening, shortly after Fanny's flight, Jim took him out for a drink, and the old man's mind turned to the thought of what had happened to him; he spread his hands like claws and closed them around the place he imagined Fanny's neck to be.

"Have another drink," said Jim with an uneasy laugh.

"Oh, you'll be paid back!" old Ryan said excitedly, slapping his knee. "I'll see you're paid back!"

"Ah, you'll do nothing of the sort," growled Jim. "You had no responsibility at all for it."

Ryan scowled and drew a deep breath at the very idea that he could possibly consider it anything but a debt of honour. After a few weeks, it boiled down to credit that Jim would receive on the house he'd build when he found another girl in place of Fanny. But Jim felt he had had enough of girls. For months after, he was drinking more than he should have been.

Then, to everyone's astonishment, Fanny came home, in a brand new tailormade suit, with a hat like a hoop on her. Apparently, the ninety pounds were spent. The mothers, quivering with indignation, said the girl had no shame, and even the boys felt uneasily that though a goddess might walk out into the night with someone else's savings, it was something approaching anti-climax for her to return without it.

Her father threatened to kill her with his own two hands, but this was largely propaganda for Moll's benefit, because the truth is he was a little bit tired of Moll's high moral tone, which was rather too like that of her mother, without any of the conjugal qualifications.

Brigid was glad to see her, too, because she was doing a strong line with a bank clerk, and Moll chaperoned them ferociously. The reason was that Moll had contracted a regular—a sedate fellow called Considine, who worked in the drapery—and, drapers being the devil and all for respectability, Moll was taking no chances. For a month, she wouldn't leave Brigid alone with Fanny for fear

Fanny might corrupt her, and whatever confidences Brigid got from her sister she had to get in other people's houses. Brigid felt this was uncalled for, considering some of Moll's goings on with her previous boy friend, which she thought nobody knew about except the young man himself.

Then, one spring evening, at the Cross, just as Fanny was getting onto the tram, who should get off it but Jim Piper. He raised his hat, and Fanny, taken aback, stood and stared at him defiantly, waiting for him to begin hostilities.

"Hello, Fan," he said awkwardly.

"Hello," replied Fanny in a choking voice.

"Home for a holiday?" he asked.

"No, for good," she replied.

"Go on," said Jim, trying to make conversation. "Homesick?"

"For pity's sake," she whispered in an exasperated tone, "come on away somewhere we won't be watched."

They went off together up Montenotte, a suburban road they had often taken on their courting nights. They went up Lovers' Lane, a long, dark, winding lane with high walls and convenient gateways. It was coming on to night, and behind the young leaves the lamp at the lane's end had been lighted.

Then Fanny began to storm hysterically. She said it was all Jim's fault for not standing up for her, that he knew she was heart-scalded at home and sided with her family against her. From the way she went on, it seemed that Jim was the one who had gone off with the savings. He listened with a foolish smile until she had talked herself out.

"Well, anyway," he said, "I hope you enjoyed yourself."

"I did not enjoy myself," she replied quietly and bitterly. "I only meant to take my fare, and send you back the whole thing when I got a job, but they kept cadging till it all went on me. I all but threw myself into the river."

"Well," he said, "what's done is done, and we can be thankful 'twasn't worse."

After that, they continued to walk out together, only, as things turned out later, they didn't confine themselves to walking, for one evening Fanny broke the news to him that she was going to have a baby. She sounded awfully tough about it. They were lying in a field overlooking the valley of the city, with the long shadows of the trees all around them.

Jim was embarrassed and laughed. "That's a shock, all right," he said soberly. "What can you do?"

"Oh, I suppose I'll go back to Ronan's till it's all over," she replied lightly.

" I suppose you'll have to," Jim said broodingly. " We couldn't afford to rush into anything now."

They said nothing more for a while, and then Fanny got up and brushed herself, and they crossed the fence into the lane.

" I suppose that was why you led me up the garden path like this," she said, at last.

" Oh, begor, Fan ! " Jim said warmly. " I led you up no path."

" You wanted to get your own back on me for pinching the money," she went on in the same tone of chagrin. " We're quits now, if that's any satisfaction to you."

" I didn't want to get my own back at all," he said indignantly. " You had more experience of that than I ever had, Fan."

" Who told you that ? " she asked quickly.

" No one told me," he said gloomily. " I knew."

Things grew a little clearer in her mind. Never once had it occurred to her that Jim would know that what had sent her flying back to Cork was not the loss of the money but a silly love affair begun in the mood of braggadocio and continued till it got on her nerves. Her only satisfaction now was that, whatever advantage Jim had taken of it, he had been deeply hurt.

" I had," she said bitterly, " but never with a cowardly scut that threw it in my face after." Then she went off, half walking, half running down the lane in the twilight.

When her father knew, he covered his face with his hands. If it had been anyone else, he would have gone out and killed him—so he said, anyway—but how could he attack a boy who had already been robbed ?

Moll had no such compunction. She was now engaged to the draper's clerk, and though he was broad minded enough, as draper's clerks go, she didn't want to give him anything to be broad minded about.

She called at Jim's and had it out with his mother, an old trooper whose only comment was that Fanny should think herself lucky not to have got pneumonia as well. Encourage her son to marry a trollop who had already made away with ninety pounds that should have come to her—did Moll think she was mad ? Jim came in while the argument raged, and hung up his hat in embarrassment.

" You know what I came about, Jim," said Moll.

" If I don't, I can guess," Jim said with a smile.

" The girl has no mother," said Moll.

" If she hasn't, she has a damn good substitute," said Jim. " I never said otherwise."

" You will marry her, won't you, Jim ? " Moll said.

" I can't, Moll," he replied, raising his voice. " I might be able to afford it in a year or two, but I can't do it now."

" A year or two will be too late, Jim ! " cried Moll. " A girl in her state can well afford to do without a house, but she can't do without a husband."

" And start off in furnished rooms with a kid ? " said Jim, scowling. " I saw too many do it, Moll, and I'm not going to do it. That's all about it. She said she'd go to London."

" How can we afford to send her to London, Jim ? " Moll said with exasperation. " You know how much we have coming in."

" I'll pay my fair share of that," said Jim.

" And more fool you are ! " bawled his mother. " A girl like that, why it might be anyone's ! "

" Now, Mother," Jim said, " I'm not denying anything about myself and Fan, and I'm not trying to shift the blame, either. I'm responsible, and I'll pay what's fair, but I will not get married. That's all about it."

After that, Moll saw Father Murphy, and he promised to get Jim's employer to put the screw on. But it turned out that the employer wasn't so sanguine about his ability to do so.

" Begor, Father," he said candidly, " I wouldn't mind anyone else, only Jim is the sort of lad, if he got it into his head that he was being threatened, might walk out on me, and I'd be a long time before I got as good a man. I might talk to him in a friendly way."

But Father Murphy knew that to talk in a friendly way to a young man of character was only waste of breath.

The next time, Fanny came back from London without any display of finery ; the baby was put out to nurse in Rochestown and not referred to again by the family, and things went on much as before, except that Moll married the draper and Brigid got engaged to the bank clerk.

But then a funny thing happened. One autumn evening, Fanny was coming out of a teashop in Patrick Street when she almost bumped into Jim. It was one of those occasions when anyone is at a disadvantage—and the decision of a lifetime has to be taken on the razor's edge, without a moment's consideration.

" Hello, Jim," she said.

" Hello, Fan," drawled Jim, raising his hat. " How are you getting on ? "

" Oh, all right," said Fanny, with the sinking of the heart she would have felt anyway on realizing that the decision had been made, for better or worse.

" Going anywhere in particular ? " he asked doubtfully.

" No," she replied uneasily, realizing the enormous effort of will it would have needed to restore the situation to what it had been a minute before.

Next evening, without telling a soul, she met him at the Cross, and they went out walking again, as though nothing had happened. It was several days before it became known, and this time there was nobody who was not scandalized.

The Ryans were the most scandalized of all. It was all very well for Moll, who had her draper's clerk where he couldn't escape her, but Brigid's bank clerk was still a bit of a toss up, and everyone knew the unmannerly way the banks had of going into their officials' private business.

" A fellow that let you down like that ! " said Brigid in disgust. " You should be ashamed of yourself ! "

" Well," said Fanny, on the verge of tears, " I suppose I let him down, too."

" And damn well he made you pay for it," snapped Brigid.

" I'm only doing it for little Michael's sake," said Fanny, trying to find some reason for conduct that even she realized was unreasonable.

" Yes," said Brigid, " to make sure he's not an only child."

" I'm not such a fool," said Fanny.

" I hope not," said Brigid.

Even that much the family didn't dare to hope. Her father refused to speak to her. He was disappointed in her but he was far more disappointed in Jim, a boy who had once shown signs of character. Up to this, he had believed that it was only daughters who could make one's peace of mind so precarious, but now he began to think that a son might be as bad.

When Brigid married, it made things harder for Fanny. It is a lonesome feeling for a girl when the last of her sisters has gone off and their prams have begun to come back. In one way only, it made things easier. Gradually it began to dawn on old Ryan that this was a very suitable arrangement—a daughter to keep house for him in his old age who, unlike Moll, could never take a high moral line with him. What would not do at all for a young fellow might do very well for himself. It might be God's holy will to reward him in this way for the trials of the past.

Then, one evening, while himself and Fanny were having supper, Jim Piper walked in. Ryan looked up and turned his head away. Even Fanny was embarrassed. It wasn't at all like Jim.

" Won't you sit down ? " she said.

" Begor, I don't mind," replied Jim. " Good evening, Mr. Ryan," he added ceremoniously, but Ryan ignored him.

" I don't know what the devil is coming over Irish hospitality," said Jim good naturedly. " You say ' Good evening ' to a man and

he won't say ' Good evening ' back to you. They'll sit there drinking tea, with the pot on the hob, and not even ask have you a mouth on you."

Fanny suddenly realized what was wrong. Jim was as drunk as a lord. She had never seen him like that before.

" Will you have a cup ? " she asked, laughing in spite of herself.

" I had to ask for it," said Jim.

The old man drew a deep breath through his nose and then got up and went upstairs, banging the bedroom door behind him. No doubt he was resisting the temptation to kill Jim with his own hands.

Jim laughed. Apparently, he wasn't aware of the danger he was in. " Tell that man to come back," he said. " I want to invite him to my wedding. When would you say we ought to get married, Fan ? "

" I don't know," said Fanny, humouring him. " When do you think yourself ? "

" I don't give a damn," said Jim, rising. " I banked the last of the two hundred quid today. You can go down to Rochestown tomorrow and bring up little Mike. I can't say fairer."

Fanny stood looking at him for a few moments, unable to tell whether it was earnestness or drink, and then she suddenly gave a low moan and ran up the stairs, sobbing. Jim looked after her and collapsed back into his chair and covered his face with his hands. Her father stamped heavily down the stairs and stood at the foot, like the hero of a melodrama.

" What ails her ? " he snapped.

Jim looked up. " The same thing that ails me," he said glumly. " ' Hope deferred maketh the heart sick.' You can start on the house whenever you like. The money is there now."

Ryan digested this for several minutes before the beauty of it began to dawn on him. He nodded several times. Then he winked. " I think we'd be justified in celebrating the happy event," he said archly. " Fanny ! " he called up the stairs.

There was no reply.

" We'll let her alone," he whispered after a moment's pause. " I suppose it came as a bit of a shock. You ruffian ! " he added, with another wink at Jim. " If I'd have done it thirty years ago, I'd have been master in my own house."

* * *

THE EDITOR REGRETS

" *The bride's mother wore an ecru-lace tablecloth with crocheted centrepiece, upon which sat the three tiered wedding cake.*" From the Social Column of the *Alberta Globe*

★*Once in the year, when the October moon is at its full, there is enacted far out in the bleak wastes of the North Sea, and in the wide sweeps of Arctic Ocean, a supra-natural deep sea drama that yet defies explanation. Then it seems, with one accord, the Moon, mistress of the tides, receives homage and tithe from the teeming millions of her ocean underworld—*

" And Seas with all their finny drove
Now to the Moon in wavering Morrice move "

MOMENT OF THE HERRING

by VINCENT CORNIER

TOWARDS eleven o'clock on that October night the moon cleared its face and rode at the full within dark cobalt depths. What little wind there had been over the North Sea waters, now died. A peace was upon the ocean and, slowly, as the surface smoothed, the places where the fish went on their midnight sorties were revealed.

The summer had died late. Hence phosphorescence, which the slightest touch of frost would have killed, was active. Bolting plumes of blue showed where mackerel " balls " hurtled along. A slower and a deeper tide—a mirror, it almost seemed, of the Milky Way—betrayed the lordly sloth of herring shoals. Squids, like tiny green comets, flashed between surface mackerel and the lower herring. Halcyon darts of dogfish harried mackerel and herring alike.

Then birds began to move out from the land into the middle spaces of the waters. Birds, not normally nocturnal, lined the air from north and west. Birds, not normally known in the mid-sea, surged from wildest Scottish coasts and ended flights of nigh on two hundred miles—exactly above the vasty fire in the depths which marked the herring. Even as they congregated in air, that shoaling doubled upon its numbers again and yet again until, at half past eleven, it covered an area of more than a hundred acres—enormously exceeding any shoal formation encountered by fishermen.

And, in the Smiths Knoll Area, off the East Anglian coast, drifter masters watched and waited for those brown markings on the paper of their echo-sounders which would have recorded herring

traffics, had there been any near. They slowly steamed north, hoping for better reward. For these were the *full farlin* nights—the *eighty-netter* nights—when drifters went abroad with all the net and gear they could handle. The moon drew fish into the surface fathom and thus brought them into disaster: to immense harvestings by men.

Gannets screamed. An alien *fulmar-petrel* jetted acid and stinking oil as it swerved to avoid a heavily sailing shag. Saddlebacks and herring gulls swirled in myriad-headed companies. Merganser floated and even sheldrake edged the "spratlings" outside the main shoal area.

They waited in impatience for the moment of the kill. They knew that moment had a pre-ordained precision and as it neared, their lust grew greater. This was the one night; this the one hour. Soon would arrive that strange spell of mere minutes, when Nature arrested the incidence of one of her immutable laws. Instinct informed the things of Nature that this time must come to pass . . . as, yearly, it had come to pass from the beginning of time on these rich waters.

In the east was a suddenly thunderous roaring. The sea seethed and great arches and monoliths of spray arose, with gigantic grey forms springing and writhing among them. Grampus and herring whales were at quarrel, savaging one another in water, ramming one another in air. Even as they fought, the sullen tunny took opportunity and closed in on the shoaling. Theirs was a terrible momentum: half ton giants clad in lilac flame, hissing and hammering on the surface, followed by shrieking night birds.

All was abomination. Wings whistled, mighty fish made tempest noise. Silver radiance was above, phantom star blue flarings wavered below. And all made prelude to this one awesome moment which neared, to be a climax fallen on this one hour, of this one night, out of all hours and nights within a year.

The herring revealed their places with increasing clearness. Phosphorescence blazed over a territory wider than many a city park. Lower wheeled the lusting birds. Savagely encroaching came the Indian circles of the preying-fish.

In an instant . . . the sea seemed suds. Then it stilled into a heavy silver crust. It was as though the very texture of the waters had been altered into corrugations—infinitely irradiated corrugations—of metal. One moment there was a bitter susurration, as of a boiling volcanic tide, the next was stillness . . . until the birds swooped and the foam-rip of tunny and hollow booming of whales came into the area from all quarters.

There lay the herring. Innumerable millions of fish encrusted the waters as though floated there in death. Their gills did not move.

Each lay on its side in utter inertia. Even when beaks plunged, flesh did not twitch under the impacts. Not a fin nor a tail had any motion. And the characteristic ruby blood-flush below the stare of herring eyes had disappeared, to leave the fish as pallid as whiting. Not one herring was wholly immersed in its element. Every one lay, apparently paralysed, in that October air of night.

For a time the combined slaughter of fish-of-prey diminished the herring in hundreds of thousands, yet no man could have seen diminution of their mass. The night birds took toll as great. Softly undulant, sweeping shorewards on the flowing tide, the herring accepted their doom.

A gigantic tremor shook the fish at last. A noise of gurgling, even a liquid noise of laughter, went upon the waters.

Almost as speedily—and as eerily—as it had formed, the silver encrustation broke up and vanished. The enormous tonnage of re-created life plunged down again into the deep.

And the moment of the herring—that moment which comes only within the astronomical measure of the exact full of October moon, and at no other time in all the year—was ended.

The tunny and the herring whales were herded together, glutted. The heavy birds sagged slowly to the land.

Three hours later, in the south, echo-sounders on the drifters recorded the approaching of a multitude of shoals running at little more than a fathom in depth : a phenomenal visitation. They were shoals " wick " with energy and purpose. And they streamed down from northern latitudes—resurrected from those appointed places and out of that awful moment of mystery . . . wherein they had died beneath the majesty of their fatal moon.

* * *

SHAVIAN TOUCH

George Bernard Shaw some years ago was addressing a meeting of Socialists in London, and expressed his disgust of the slums and the huge cars that blocked the roads.

" How can such luxuries exist while a single slum remains ? " he asked. " At this moment there is one of them outside this very building."

He paused, then perhaps seeing the light of battle in the eyes of his audience, added : " Before you break it up, however, I ought to tell you that it belongs to me."

Belfast Telegraph

BROOMSTICKS

With a sprinkling of bat's blood, an imp or two, and my own Black Tom Cat's Tail

The Stiony on my right Eye-lid still swelled and inflamed very much. As it is commonly said that the Eye-lid being rubbed by the tail of a black Cat would do it much good if not entirely cure it, and having a black Cat, a little before dinner I made a trial of it, and very soon after dinner I found my Eye-lid much abated of the swelling and almost free from Pain. I cannot therefore but conclude it to be of the greatest service to a Stiony on the Eye-lid. Any other Cats Tail may have the above effect in all probability—but I did my Eye-lid with my own black Tom Cat's Tail . . .

JAMES WOODFORDE,
The Diary of a Country Parson, March 11, 1791

Bramble Fingers

Bramble fingers drop them in,
tangerines with wrinkled skin,
rosemary and redolent thyme,
tapering strawberry, cooling lime,
orange, quince, and apricot—
all is poison in the witch's pot.

All is poison in the witch's pot,
strawberry and apricot
turn to brew as scummed and dull
as toadstools grown from a nightmare's skull,
venom drips from every skin
as bramble fingers drop them in.

Delicate fruits that kindly grew
hung in the sun in a net of dew,
simple herbs that yet could spread
a cloud of incense overhead
transform themselves, bubble and clot,
to poison in the witch's pot.

ELIZABETH COATSWORTH

The Devil in the Bottle

" And ever after that," said Siani, " the place was haunted."

" Who haunted it ? "

" No one rightly knew . . . but any way it was a bad spirit, and the family had to leave the house, which fell into ruins. But the old gatekeeper and his wife lived on at the little lodge, and often in the night they would be awakened by a bellowing like ten thousand bulls. Then they would see a light come through the gate ; it would stop there and laugh. After that the ruined house would be all lit up . . .

" At last they sent for a Wise Man to lay the ghost . . . The Wise Man took a bottle with water in it ; he lit a candle and put it in the bottle ; he read something from a book. Then he and the old Gypsy woman—I don't like to say her name, God rest her soul ! she was always good to me—knelt down hand in hand by the book and spoke the words together ; I could not hear what they said . . .

" The Wise Man blindfolded the old woman and led her across the field ; she carried the bottle and the bad devil that was in it. They went down the steps into the boathouse, and there the two knelt again. Then the old Gypsy gave the bottle to the Wise Man and spoke the words, while he dropped it into the lake. Now the ghost was laid, he was under the water, and troubled the place no more . . .

" They came back to where they had left me and the book. The Wise Man took a box from his pocket. ' There, old woman, take this, open it ! ' A toad jumped from the box ; there was a name written on its back. ' Breathe into its mouth,' he said, ' and I will do so after thee.' This was to bind her to him, so that he could call on her again.

M. Eileen Lyster, *The Gypsy Life of Betsy Wood*

Wonderful—If it be True

A wonderful thing it is—if it be true—which they report of the ashes of a star-lizard or Stellion ; that if the same be enwrapped in some lint or linnen rag, & held in the left hand, it stirreth up the heat of lust ; but shift the same into the right hand, it wil coole one as much. Moreover, that if one put under the pillow where a woman laies her head, a few flockes, or locke of wooll soked well in batts bloud, it will set her on to desire the company of a man, or if she do take a goose tongue either in meat or drink . . .

Pliny the Elder, A.D. 23–79,
Natural History, translated by Philemon Holland

Note for Farmers

To preserve your cows against harm, pour holy water down their throats on Midsummer Day, and sing the Athanasian Creed to them in Latin.

Country belief in Somersetshire

Down the Lane at Midnight

Blackberry, elderberry,
And dead white nettle,
Growing up together,
Root, leaf, stem and petal ;
Blackberry, elderberry,
Well worth the King's metal,
But what can be done with
The dead white nettle? . . .

Good wives and kind maids
Pluck the dark elderberry,
And stew him, and brew him,
His juices are very
Welcome in winter
With pine-logs a-flicker ;
Then bring your red cordials
And night-cap liquor . . .

Could you see the wise woman
Down the lane at midnight,
Looking up to make sure
The moon stood aright ;
She cropped the dead nettle,
Popped it into her kettle,
Blew the oak-coals a-light :
And the Owl of Cwm Cawlwyd
Came out of the nettle !

W. Force Stead

Definition

A witch must be a hagged old woman, living in a rotten cottage, under a hill, by a wood side, and must be frequently spinning at the door: she must have a black cat, two or three broomsticks, an imp or two, and two or three diabolical teats to suckle her imps . . .

From *Roundabout our Coal-fire*, 1730

THE SINGING PHARMACIST

"Just like a story out of a book," he said

by JOSEPH WECHSBERG

THE Pharmacie of Monsieur Bertrand was situated at the end of a narrow side street in La Condamine, the ancient town which extends round the bay of Monaco, below the fashionable hills of Monte Carlo. There are no gambling casinos, sporting clubs, exotic gardens, or museums in the Condamine, and tourists seldom go there.

Most inhabitants of the Condamine are Monégasques or Monagascans, as the natives of the little Principality of Monaco are called. They work eight hours a day in Monte Carlo as croupiers, bellboys, flower vendors, or waiters, and when they return home, they take off their dinner jackets, aprons, or uniforms, put on comfortable clothes, and go for an apéritif to their favourite café where they won't be bothered by the sight of foreigners.

The Pharmacie Bertrand, a modest establishment, fitted well into its homely, middle class neighbourhood. Monsieur Bertrand never aspired to compete with the chic Pharmacie Moderne and the Pharmacie Générale which had mirrors, neon lights, automatic scales, and considerably higher prices.

Above the entrance was an inconspicuous name plate. Practically the only distinction was a list of Monsieur Bertrand's achievements in the field of pharmacology, which was glued to the inside of the glass door in old fashioned Gothic letters:

M. Aristide Bertrand: 1st Class Herbalist; Chemist of the Montpelier University; Ex-Assistant Head of Natural History at Marseilles University; Ex-Chief Chemist of Avignon General Hospital.

By that time either Monsieur Bertrand or the sign painter must have got tired of the number of degrees, for underneath the last line there was added a simple "etc., etc., etc." When one opened the door, a bell above it gave out a couple of tired rings—to no purpose, since Monsieur Bertrand was not concerned with customers and Madame Eugénie, his wife, was too busy to care.

Monsieur Bertrand would be behind the end of the counter, by the door, and he would be talking, or singing. He was always

talking or singing, to a friend, a customer, the postman, a stranger, or to his dog. If there was no one in the shop, which happened rarely, Monsieur Bertrand would address himself to a large display of laxo-digestive bottles which were arranged on the floor in front of the counter in the form of a pyramid.

He was a fat little man with a big round head. This fooled many people who thought that Monsieur Bertrand was sitting behind the counter; actually he was standing, leaning against a high stool. He had the friendly, uncomplicated round face that one finds painted on balloons. He wore a blue beret and a grey chemist's coat, perfunctorily held together below his stomach by a safety pin, and he had a scarf of heavy cashmere wool wound twice round his neck.

The Condamine has as mild a climate as certain parts of Florida. Some Monégasques brusquely deny the existence of rain, and call it "liquid sunshine," but Monsieur Bertrand wouldn't take off his scarf even on the balmiest days, because he was afraid that a sudden shift of wind might bring disaster to his voice.

No one knew why he had ever become a chemist. Monsieur Bertrand was a singer, a fact well known to passers-by who could hear his lyric baritone voice from inside the pharmacie. He didn't content himself with merely singing popular songs, melodies, or airs. He would perform whole operas, a different one every day, and the programme of the day was written on a white card which he stuck into a peroxide display on the counter.

That evening in the winter of 1930, when I came into the pharmacie for the first time, the programme card on the counter said, TODAY: PAGLIACCI (Leoncavallo), and Monsieur Bertrand was in the middle of the "prologue." Standing in front of the counter in obvious admiration was an elderly squalid man, looking like a retired adventurer, whom I remembered dimly having seen somewhere before.

I was then living in a run-down establishment in the Condamine which called itself "hotel" but was not listed as such in the local hotel register. Owing to the unbalanced state of my budget, I couldn't afford a better place.

I was employed as reserve violinist at the Monte Carlo Opera. My duty consisted of being ready to replace, at shortest notice, one of the six violinists in case of sickness or drunkenness. For this perpetual state of preparedness I was paid seven hundred and fifty francs a month; for each performance I was to get an additional one hundred and twenty francs. Unfortunately the six violinists were exceptionally healthy and sober, and during the past six weeks I had not been called upon to work once.

I ate in cheap little cafés never mentioned in any guide of good eating, and the meals left me either hungry or sick. It was after a dish of tripe à la Niçoise that I was seized with pains, just as I passed the Pharmacie Bertrand.

Monsieur Bertrand didn't bother to glance at me when I came towards the counter. He was finishing the "prologue." Then he said to the retired adventurer, "There you are, my friend. The important thing is to keep your mouth half closed, as if you were singing 'Oh' all the time, and not open it widely, like singing 'ah.' If you sing 'ahs,' you will hear yourself but the tone will not reach the auditorium and after all, it's the audience you want to sing for, isn't it?"

Monsieur Bertrand paused dramatically, holding the outstretched fingers of both hands in front of his face, while his mouth formed a silent but eloquent "oh," and then he let out a powerful sound which shook the peroxide display on the counter and the bottles behind it.

The retired adventurer nodded miserably and said, "That's what I have been trying to tell Monsieur Rossi all the time but he says, 'Tarouel, you can't sing the entire part of the third smuggler in oh!'"

At that point I recognized the man as Monsieur Tarouel, a minor member of the local opera company.

Taking advantage of a momentary lull in the conversation I hastened to explain to Monsieur Bertrand the symptoms of my stomach ache, and asked him for some remedy. He didn't even bother to glance at me but said to the other man, "Monsieur Rossi owes his position as choirmaster to the fact that he is the son-in-law of one of the directors of the sporting club. He doesn't know the first thing about the art of singing."

Without turning round, he stretched out his right hand behind his back, opened a drawer, groped for a small bottle with a brownish liquid, and knocked the wedding ring on his fourth finger against an empty water glass on the counter.

The glass emitted a muted ring, and a woman came out of the back room. She must have been two heads taller than Monsieur who, I found out, was her husband. Everything about her was thin, skinny, and angular, except her spectacles which were thick and curved. She was the most unwomanly woman I've ever seen: her voice was deep and her hair looked as if she'd never combed it in front of a mirror. She wore a white doctor's coat and had a pencil stuck behind her ear.

Monsieur Bertrand gave her the bottle with his left hand, pointing at me with his right, and turned back towards Monsieur Tarouel. "My friend, Monsieur Rossi dared even to criticize

Battistini, the great Battistini, an acknowledged master of *bel canto*. It was Battistini who told me once, 'Bertrand, you don't sing with your throat. It's theré,'" Monsieur Bertrand touched the safety pin below his stomach, "'that you produce your tone.'"

Meanwhile Madame Bertrand had counted ten drops of the liquid in a small spoon which she handed to me across the counter. I took the medicine, although I was afraid that Monsieur Bertrand might have reached behind his back for the wrong bottle. I swallowed bravely and tasted the flavour of bitter almonds, and almost instantly I felt better. Madame put away the spoon and the bottle and retired while Monsieur was saying to Tarouel:

"Battistini was a great artist and he had the physique of a singer. He was a big man and had an astonishing amount of breath. Of course, he didn't have the physique of Chaliapin. Ah, Chaliapin!" Monsieur Bertand's hands outlined the powerful shoulders of the great Russian singer. "When he died towards the end of *Boris Godunov* and fell down from his throne, the entire Casino trembled and the gamblers in the baccarat saloons thought it was an earthquake.

"I remember one performance of Chaliapin as Boris Godunov. I sat in the fourth row and next to me was an American who went into the gambling rooms for a few rounds of roulette during the intervals. It is sad, my friend, when people play roulette between the acts of an opera, but what can you do? Somewhere I read that in Buenos Aires and New York they have drinks during the interval, which is even worse.

"Well, this American seemed to have a stroke of luck because he wasn't in his seat at the beginning of the third act. He came back as Chaliapin was in the middle of his big air, driven across the stage by violent remorse and hallucinations. Just then the American squeezed past the people in their seats, stepped on their toes, and as if all this hadn't created enough commotion, he tripped and dropped a number of chips and gold coins which he'd been holding in his hand. The coins fell all over the floor, making a terrible noise, and people started to shush. You'd think that the American would have sat down and waited until the curtain fell. But no! He had the nerve to crawl down and start collecting his chips and gold coins while the great Chaliapin was getting on with his aria.

"The inevitable happened. Chaliapin finally lost his patience and gave the conductor an angry sign to stop. Then he stepped towards the footlights and asked, with a fine show of sarcasm, 'If you are ready now, sir, perhaps you will permit me to finish my aria?' People were aghast, but the American, having collected his new fortune, sat quietly down in his seat and said, 'Sure—go ahead.'"

Two shrivelled old ladies came into the pharmacie for some nose drops, and Monsieur Bertrand knocked his wedding ring against the glass on the counter and issued a short command to his wife. Then a little boy came for aspirins, and a man brought a prescription. Monsieur Bertrand stood at his place without so much as flinching while his wife ran back and forth, working.

I wanted to pay for the medicine and handed him a note, but he ignored the money and gave me a short glance—the first since I had come in. He asked me, " You are a musician, young man ? " I don't know what made him recognize my profession. Perhaps it was the sallow complexion of my under-nourished face, or my velvet coat which I was wearing in those days to bolster my artistic ego. When I said that I was hired by the Opera he refused my money and shook hands with me. I argued in vain.

Later I found out that he never accepted money from anybody even vaguely connected with The Arts. The entire personnel of the Monte Carlo Opera—there was one cast for the French language operas and another one for opera sung in Italian—would forever come to the pharmacie for throat pills, inhalation treatments, raw eggs, and also for advice and financial assistance. Monsieur Bertrand was always ready to help a baritone distressed by his debts or a tenor distressed by his amours, as long as they followed his advice in artistic matters. It was said that a whole generation of singers had lived on his charitable whims.

When Monsieur Bertrand decided to lend some money, he would ring for his wife, for he was too lazy to open the cash drawer in front of his stomach. This was the only occasion when Madame Eugénie could get access to the drawer. It was almost impossible at other times to dislodge Monsieur Bertrand from his place and open the drawer when a customer wanted change.

She would try to slip her arm from behind round her husband's waist and if this wouldn't work, she would try to get in over his shoulder. Perhaps he would move away imperceptibly from the drawer, and she would sneak in with split-second precision, pull open the drawer, change the money, throw in the note, close the drawer, and move away. I couldn't help feeling sorry for Madame Eugénie, who was called upon to perform the difficult feats of pharmacology and to operate the cash drawer as furtively as a thief.

After the first evening I would drop in frequently at the pharmacie to talk about music and listen to Monsieur Bertrand's stories of Caruso, Tetrazzini, or de Reszke, and when I knew him better, I once asked him why he let Madame Eugénie work so hard.

" Ah, poor Madame Eugénie," he said with detachment, as if he were talking of a stranger. " It is not easy to keep a pharmacie going. And after her work she has to go home and to do all the

cooking and washing and cleaning because I couldn't live in an untidy house. A matter of self-preservation, you understand.

" Sometimes Madame Eugénie has to work until after midnight, and naturally she must get up at seven to give me breakfast and open up the pharmacie. Madame received her degree from the Faculté at Marseilles and she is not a bad chemist, I daresay. Unfortunately she is bothered by her very bad eyesight. And she never recognizes a face, not even members of her own family when they have been away for a few weeks ! "

Monsieur Bertrand sighed and said, " It is very sad but I tell myself that there is no reason to feel depressed about women. I have no use for women, young man. On the opera stage their phrasing and diction is often faulty and they try to impress their audience with their high heels and what's above rather than with their high C's and what's below. And if there is one sight on the stage that revolts me, it's a coloratura. I say, leave the singing birds to God and his Nature, and concentrate on good solid voices. There's nothing worse than hearing a human nightingale emit trills and scales that make your skin break out in goose pimples."

A ramshackle old lady came in, wearing a satin dress that was covered with pieces of threadbare chinchilla. She smelled of a cheap perfume and greeted Monsieur Bertrand exuberantly. After she had purchased a bottle of hair oil, and left, Monsieur Bertrand said, " That was Madame Richard. Ah, young man, she was the greatest cocotte of her day. She would drink nothing but a pint of champagne, served in a hollowed-out pineapple, and it had to be a fresh pineapple for each new pint." He shrugged and said, " She ruined a great many people. But so what ? She was a woman. Ask Monsieur de Broche about her. He could tell you quite a few tales ! "

Monsieur de Broche was a frail little man with a beautifully trimmed grey beard. He wore a pince-nez, had his hair carefully parted in the middle, and looked like a cross between a member of the Academie Française and a board chairman of the Banque de France. His trousers were always creased, his white spats immaculate, and he would wear a grey Homburg, a cane with a silver knob, and a white carnation in his lapel. Under his arm he would carry a leather-bound volume of Maupassant stories.

Monsieur de Broche spoke a beautiful stilted French and every once in a while he would cough delicately behind the back of his hand. Monsieur Bertrand introduced him to me as ' the eminent mathematician.' " Once three professors of the Sorbonne were here on holiday and got deadlocked over a question of higher mathematics," he said. " They called on Monsieur de Broche as judge and accepted his decision. Correct, Monsieur ? "

The little man smiled in embarrassment and whispered into Monsieur Bertrand's ear, discreetly pointing at the lower region of his stomach. The pharmacist struck the glass and shouted at his wife to give Monsieur de Broche ' one of those,' and he pointed at the pyramidal display of the laxo-digestive bottles on the floor. The little man blushed, thanked him, took the medicine, and shuffled away.

Monsieur Bertrand looked after him sadly. " Poor Monsieur de Broche," he said. " He was one of those who came here with a pile of money, looking forward to a sunny old age. Eh bien, you can imagine what happened."

" Roulette ? " I asked.

" He works by system. Queues up every morning ten minutes before they open the gambling rooms. A systematic man cannot afford to miss the first spin of the wheel because his system is invariably based on the very first spin. If you go there one morning, you will see Monsieur de Broche. He runs towards table seven, sits down on seat number seven, which he has reserved, the second seat to the left of the assistant head of the saloon, takes out pencil and notebook, touches his necktie, which is supposed to bring luck, and then he waits."

" What does he wait for ? " I asked.

Monsieur Bertrand sent a couple of new customers over to his wife and said, " He waits for number twenty nine to come up. If twenty nine comes out, he waits two more throws and stakes twenty francs. That is, unless the twenty nine is followed by seventeen. If that happens Monsieur de Broche will not play for the entire day. His system has something to do with astrology. Once he came to me and said, ' Bertrand, I've looked up your stars. Tomorrow afternoon at four sixteen the zero will come out twice for you.' Naturally, we natives of Monaco are not permitted inside the Casino, but Monsieur de Broche offered to stake for me. I turned him down. I have no time for such foolishness. Well, you may think what you please, but the zero *did* come out twice in succession, the next afternoon, at four sixteen ! "

" Did Monsieur de Broche make his own stake and win ? " I asked.

" Of course not, young man. The zero had been in my stars, not his. No systematic man will ever stake on somebody else's horoscope. Poor Monsieur de Broche ! He makes just enough money to buy some potatoes and a little parsley every day. He cooks the potatoes over a small stove in his room. Once in a while I send up a pound of butter and he melts a little and pours it over the potatoes. No wonder he has stomach trouble most of the time. He lives in a shabby back room facing the railway embankment. He's paid up the rent a year in advance so they can't throw him

out if the roulette should be against him for some time. He's also paid up the potatoes at the grocery shop until Christmas—three sacks of potatoes. It's a wretched life. He's a doomed man."

I met Monsieur de Broche a few days later, after leaving the stage door of the Casino where I had enquired about the excellent health and sobriety of my violinists. He sat on a bench on the terrace reading his Maupassant. He invited me to sit down and said he'd finished working for the day, as he called it.

"I always finish as soon as I've made one hundred francs," he said. "Sometimes it takes me two minutes and sometimes eleven hours." He said he was going home to cook his potatoes. "I'll stop at the pharmacie for a little tonic," he said, holding his stomach. "God bless Monsieur and Madame Bertrand. What would I do without them?"

I asked him why Monsieur Bertrand treated his wife with such apparent lack of consideration. Monsieur de Broche sighed and pointed at the volume in his hands. "Maupassant could have given you the right answer to that. It is amazing how much wisdom you'll find in his work . . ." he sighed again.

"Bertrand met Eugénie twenty years ago in the gallery of the opera house at Marseilles. She was a young student then and very impressed by Bertrand's knowledge of opera. He would know the entire score and to prove his knowledge, he would hum or whisper the airs and passages in advance, like a prompter. He could give the singers their cues with more assurance than the conductor. Naturally, his behaviour irritated the listeners near him and they would call the usher and have him thrown out.

"Eugénie thought he was a great, forceful man. People now wonder why she sticks by him, working like a couple of horses, while he doesn't do anything. Eh bien, you can look it up in Maupassant. She loved her husband, quite simply. And she doesn't have to worry about his running away with some other woman. There are a lot of strange things going on behind the outwardly quiet, ancient houses of the Condamine, Monsieur. A lot of women suffer from their husband's infidelity and have to come to the Pharmacie for bromides and sleeping pills. Madame Eugénie knows them all. *She* doesn't have to worry. Monsieur Bertrand is too engrossed in the artistic side of life to bother with its carnal aspects."

A vivacious petite brunette came out of the Casino's stage door, and my heart began to throb. She was Madame Grimaldi, the piquant coloratura of the Italian cast. I admired her greatly, not so much for her voice which was bad or her acting which was non-existent, but for her slim ankles and the tremolo of her hips

which would make a poet out of a pawnshop proprietor. After her performance in *Daughter of the Regiment* one French critic wrote, '*Madame Grimaldi isn't much of an opera singer but she could certainly make a perfect daughter of the regiment.*'

She seemed to be acquainted with Monsieur de Broche, for they shook hands and he introduced her to me. I had to admit that she looked a trifle on the vulgar side from close-up and she laughed in an irritating, high pitched way, but I had not been mistaken about her ankles and hips. She said she'd been forced to cancel her performance that evening as Traviata owing to a sore throat, and did Monsieur de Broche know a reliable pharmacist, not one of those robbers who was only out to cheat you ?

Monsieur de Broche said he had just the right man for her, and we started to walk down the Avenue de Monte Carlo. Madame Grimaldi was talking all the time, patting her nose with a lace handkerchief. She spoke French with a heavy Italian accent and complained about her difficulties with the French language.

" I've been trying to find a teacher," she said, " but they all care only about your voice and don't bother about the diction. My career suffers because they don't want to let me sing opera in French." She chatted on merrily, linking her arms into Monsieur de Broche's and mine. My knees were weak and I felt as if I were walking on clouds as we arrived at the Pharmacie Bertrand.

The daily programme on the counter said, TODAY : MANON (Massenet), and Monsieur Bertrand was singing lustily. We had to stand there and listen and I think Madame Grimaldi got tired standing there, for she began to join him in a duet. Monsieur Bertrand stopped singing, stared at her angrily and said, " I wouldn't sing in French if I were you, Madame. Your diction is pitiful."

There was an uncomfortable silence, interrupted by Monsieur de Broche's delicate cough. Monsieur de Broche introduced Madame Grimaldi, and Monsieur Bertrand said pointedly, " Madame Melba had poor diction. I never liked her. Women believe they can get away with murder on the stage if they are reasonably pretty." He gave Madame Grimaldi a cold going-over. " They can't, as far as I am concerned."

Madame Grimaldi started to cry without tears, patting her eyes with her handkerchief, and said she would give *everything* if someone would show her how to sing *maître* or *peut-être*, and she sang a few French words.

Monsieur Bertrand raised his hands in horror. " Your mouth is too wide open, Madame," he said, " *Regardez !* " he opened his mouth, not too wide, placed his fingers at the corners of his mouth to indicate its exact position and sang, *Cher maître, peut-être la*

fenêtre va disparaître—" Dear master, perhaps the window will disappear "—and Madame Grimaldi started to laugh.

Monsieur Bertrand said archly, " Instead of giggling, Madame, you had better try this sentence yourself."

She did but the way she sang it, the window didn't disappear. " Something wrong here," she said, taking Monsieur Bertrand's hand and placing it square on her throat. " Something bobs up and down that ruins my ' e.' "

Monsieur Bertrand frowned. He bent over the counter and studied her throat with cold, clinical interest, and then he told her to try again. This went on for a while. Madame Grimaldi didn't seem to notice me any more, so I left. I was deeply hurt and when I heard her a few evenings later, as Gilda in *Rigoletto*, I tried to convince myself that she was just a third-rate artist, especially in a part in which she couldn't show the tremolo of her hips. The next day one of the second violinists fell sick and I was called to replace him. I was quite busy for the following two weeks, what with rehearsals and evening performances, and had no time to drop in at the Pharmacie Bertrand.

When the season ended, I went there to say goodbye but Monsieur Bertrand wasn't at the pharmacie, Madame Eugénie didn't recognize me and asked me what I wanted. She said her husband had gone to Avignon to attend the funeral of his sister. " They didn't get along very well," said Madame Eugénie. " His sister was a member of a singing society and she and my husband didn't agree on matters of singing. The society will sing at the funeral service and Monsieur said he'd better go and see that they sing properly." A few customers came and Madame Eugénie hurried away.

I left Monte Carlo the next morning.

When I returned eighteen years later, much had changed, even in the never-never world of Monte Carlo. I didn't expect to see the Pharmacie Bertrand as I walked down into the Condamine, but sure enough, there was the sign above the door and the lettering behind the glass, though some letters had come off and the word ' Pharmacien ' had whittled down to ' Parmcin.'

There was no one behind the counter, but I heard a noise in the back room and then Madame Eugénie came out. She seemed even taller and thinner than I remembered her, and her hair hung down in ugly grey strands. " Monsieur," she said in her deep voice, eyeing me through her spectacles, " what can I do for you ? "

I said I had been here in the years before the war. She nodded politely but I was positive she didn't remember me. I pointed at the spot where Monsieur Bertrand had always stood but somehow

I was afraid to ask her any questions. So much had happened during the occupation. Was he dead? Had he been taken away? Finally I said, " . . . And Monsieur Bertrand? . . . " pointing again at his place behind the counter.

Madame Eugénie followed my look and then she nodded as if to thank me for my sympathy. " Yes," she said with a heavy sigh. " It is very, very—"

The bell rang, a customer came in and she let me stand there. I walked out wondering what she had been about to say. I walked back to Monte Carlo and there, on the terrace in the sunshine, sat Monsieur de Broche, a little older, whiter, more fragile, but otherwise not very changed. The trousers were still creased, the white spats immaculate, the white carnation in his buttonhole and he was reading Maupassant.

He recognized me at once and greeted me warmly. He said he'd lived here throughout the entire war. " Ah, *c'était dur*," he said. " The Boches controlled the food supplies. At one time we didn't even get potatoes, and you know how I need them. I had to switch to beans. They didn't do my stomach any good."

I asked him how he was doing in his ' work ' and he nodded. " Inflation has caught up with the stakes. In the old days you could live nicely on a hundred francs a day. Now one has to win fifteen hundred a day, just to keep body and soul together. But my potatoes and my little room are paid up until the end of 1950, and at my age one doesn't make any long range plans."

We looked out over the Mediterranean and I reminded Monsieur de Broche that eighteen years ago we had been sitting on the same bench.

" Yes, I do remember," he said. " Often have I wondered whether Fate, as Maupassant would say, didn't use me as its unwitting tool. Haven't you heard about Monsieur Bertrand? Ah, *quelle misère*! You do remember Madame Grimaldi, the coloratura, don't you? "

" The racy brunette with the slim ankles? "

" They don't seem to be slim any more," Monsieur de Broche said. " Well, it all started that evening at the pharmacie when she told him about her troubles with the French diction. It seems that he became fascinated by her poverty of intellect which, he told me once, was amazing even in a coloratura. Madame Grimaldi's French ' e ' became a challenge to Monsieur Bertrand. He would compose special exercises for her, like *Mon élève, une jeune veuve, avait une rêve à Genève*—' My pupil, a young widow, had a dream in Geneva.' He would sing it first, then she would try."

It was terrible; the noise in the pharmacie became too much even for the old customers. So Monsieur Bertrand would go to

Madame's apartment to instruct her, and that is how the whole thing must have started."

Monsieur de Broche coughed delicately behind the back of his hand, and said, "Madame Grimaldi stayed on for a couple of months after the season had ended. One day in May she was gone. So was Monsieur Bertrand. Poor Madame Eugénie—her world was a shambles. No one understood how she was able to carry on. For a year after he'd gone she would wear black dresses as if she were in mourning. But then she found out that business suffered; people don't like to see mourning clothes in a pharmacie. So she put on her white coat again. But she would never talk of Monsieur Bertrand. He was dead for her . . ."

"And Monsieur Bertrand?"

Monsieur de Broche gave a tired shrug. "He went to Paris with Madame Grimaldi but it seems her French 'e' wasn't good after all, because she couldn't find any work there. They went to Italy and later to South America. Last year a friend from Buenos Aires wrote me that he'd seen them down there. She is singing in a cheap little operetta theatre. Her voice is shrill and she has become fat and ugly. Monsieur Bertrand stays at home, doing all the housework, washing, cleaning, cooking, and scrubbing the floors. He's working like a Roman slave and is said to have lost sixty pounds in weight."

Monsieur de Broche closed his Maupassant and put the book under his arm. "It's just like one of Maupassant's stories," he said. "An extraordinary writer. His insight was fabulous." He adjusted his carnation and got up. "Time for me to go home and boil my potatoes. There's work to do tomorrow, you know."

* * *

MY SON, MY SON!

A taxi carrying three French Canadian priests slightly jarred another hack immediately ahead, in the Place de la Concorde, Paris. The assaulted driver at once jumped out into the dense stalled traffic, and after a quick survey of the few scratches visible, began casting florid doubts upon the offending hackdriver's sanity, morals and ethics.

Knowing his passengers understood every word, the priests' chauffeur answered nothing. With growing wrath he sat in complete silence.

Finally, his opponent exhausted both wind and vocabulary and, satisfied to have had the first and last word, walked back to his cab. That was the other driver's cue.

"My compliments, M'sieu," he called, "to Mademoiselle, your mother!" Told by H. T. KILLEN

SEARCH IN THE MIST

**Somewhere below him on the angry sea
a life raft bobbed — and aboard it
were his wife and child**

by WILL F. JENKINS

HE had reached that high estate in which people who didn't know him personally left off his rank in speaking of him. He was Joe Chalmers, the top British jet pilot, and he was fed up. It was night-time, and he sat in a passenger seat behind a young pilot and co-pilot in a two engined ship which was not a jet. The instrument board showed a clutter of dials and indicators. Somewhere a beam speaker made chirping noises. Outside the windows the engine exhausts flickered and licked bluish flames in pure blackness.

"This must seem jolly slow to you, sir," said the young pilot apologetically. "You flew a jet over from England for the Americans, didn't you?"

Joe said, "Yes," as cordially as he could. They had babies flying ships nowadays. This pilot couldn't be over twenty three. Joe was thirty two. He felt old.

"What time did you make, sir?" asked the co-pilot respectfully.

Joe told him the time from England to Goose Bay and then on down to New York. The two of them tried to look unimpressed. They failed.

Yes, said Joe to himself. You think that's wonderful. But I don't. The glamour's gone. I'm just a thing that flies planes. I'm machinery with service ribbons. Machines don't make any mistakes. But they don't have any fun, either.

Joe thought about his son Bobby, four years old, paddling round the bedroom in his pyjamas yesterday morning back home in Dorset. And he thought of Doris blinking sleep out of her eyes to smile at him and Bobby together. That was something to wake up to! It'd hit him hard. He realized that he was astonished to feel so good just because he was married to Doris and had a little boy like Bobby.

And when he thought it over he was suddenly and violently fed up. I'm through, thought Joe. When a man is surprised to find he's human it's time to quit! I've got to learn all over again what it's like to be human. I damn nearly forgot.

It was true. He'd become a beautifully efficient device which

flew planes. Off duty, he was a gadget that fed itself and slept conscientiously and did other things to keep itself in perfect condition to fly planes. To hell with it ! thought Joe.

The plane roared on. Presently a glow appeared in the sky ahead. In minutes there were tiny coruscations of light on the horizon. Joe was under orders to report at the airfield yonder, and tomorrow he would take over a new plane. It was a very special plane.

It was a jet that crowded mach one—sound speed—just a little closer than even a jet ought to do, and it was magnificently equipped with a camera and nothing else. It was a photo-recon ship and Joe was to fly it because for best results it needed a pilot who was tops. Which was all right, except that now he wasn't interested any more.

The plane came down to a meticulously perfect landing. That landing—done with elaborate casualness—was for Joe's benefit. For him to admire. He admired.

" You fellows must fly eggs," he observed approvingly, " and hate to break them. You wouldn't."

They laughed embarrassedly, but they were flattered. Joe took his holdall over to the reception room, dumped his stuff and found where coffee was to be had.

" I just want a bunk for tonight," he explained. " My wife and son are coming over tomorrow."

By the canteen he met a reporter he knew who was Canadian correspondent to a London daily. His name was Burke and he wore tweedy civilian clothes that should have looked smart but didn't. He said, " Hello ! I thought you were at home."

" I was," said Joe. " Just got here."

" That new jet recon ? " asked Burke.

" Being only hired help," Joe told him, " I couldn't say." Then he said, " How's housing in these parts ? Doris and Bobby are flying over. We've got to stay in Canada nine months or so."

" You can use my place for a couple of days," said Burke, " while you hunt round. I've got a lift up to Goose Bay. Quite a dither up there."

" Dither ? " said Joe. " No excitement when I went through."

From here it was a good fifteen hundred miles north east to Goose Bay, and he'd been through there yesterday afternoon and it wasn't dawn yet. He hadn't felt that he was hurrying, even. When I've quit, he told himself, fifty miles is going to seem a long, long way !

The thought felt good. He was going to have a garden and get a secondhand car that he would keep going with fuse wire and clothes pegs. He would get in the way when Doris made breakfast.

He would teach Bobby to fish. He was going to be inefficient and very human and contented and not tops at anything at all.

" Didn't you hear ? It happened about seventeen hundred."

" I was on the way down from Goose Bay then," said Joe.

He didn't ask what the dither was. He was gloating privately over the future.

" An Army plane ditched," said Burke. " There were some wives and such on board."

" Tough," said Joe absently. Then he heard the words. " Army plane ? Doris and Bobby are on an Army plane. What plane ? "

He wasn't scared, of course. Nothing like that had ever happened in his life, so he couldn't imagine it.

" What plane ? " he demanded. " Doris is——"

" I should ask Traffic," said Burke. " Through there."

Joe went through a door, towards Traffic. He heard engines start, outside somewhere. He passed through another door and the engine noises dimmed.

He heard, instead, a metallic voice coming out of a loudspeaker. It said disconnected things in a loud tone. Joe felt that he was pale, though he knew he wasn't scared.

" My name's Joe Chalmers," he explained. " My wife and child were on an Army ship that left London at eleven hundred. Can you check on it ? It couldn't be the one down off Goose Bay, but——"

" I'll try, sir," said the technical sergeant.

He fiddled with dials and switches. He talked in a low tone. Outside the building, on the field, engines gunned and slowed and gunned again. A plane moved slowly, roaring, to a remote place, and then—bellowing violently—to another remoter place. Voices uttered staccato things out of boxes. The technical sergeant turned.

" They—haven't got a passenger list, sir. I'll put a query through. It shouldn't take long. I'll hunt you up, sir."

" Thanks," said Joe carefully. He went back to the canteen. The waiter tossed him a key.

" Your friend left this," he explained. " A fellow came in and said, ' Ready ? ' and they went out."

Joe picked up the key. He didn't know the address, but he forgot to think about it. The reporter was on his way up to Goose Bay because of the dither up there over an Army plane that was ditched. Joe wasn't on his way there. He walked up and down. Presently he thought, This is crazy. Last time I paced like this was when Bobby was getting born.

He'd felt an awful guilt, then, because of what Doris was going through and it was his fault and he couldn't share it. He remembered how he'd felt when a grinning nurse showed him a tiny, screwed-up

face that made mewing wails. He remembered how he'd moped a little, the first week or so after Doris came home, because she didn't seem to notice him. He'd been jealous.

Then he remembered his lunatic boasting when he learned the trick of feeding two week old Bobby with water out of a bottle. But Bobby was four, now.

He went back to Traffic again. There wasn't any news. He returned to the canteen and got another cup of coffee. He stood stirring it while pictures and memories went through his head. Doris dressing Bobby. Doris watching apprehensively while he tossed Bobby—who giggled—high in the air and caught him again. Doris with her fingers to her lips—because Bobby was asleep—coming to put her arms round him and kiss him joyously because he'd got back from—from somewhere or other.

Doris—— And Bobby, only yesterday morning, four years old, paddling round the bedroom in his pyjamas.

Joe wasn't behaving like a machine now. He suddenly realized that he was thinking the way he'd think if something had already happened. And it hadn't. Nothing could happen, of course. But when he tasted the coffee he'd been stirring it was stone cold. He left it and walked up and down without any particular reason.

The technical sergeant came looking for him.

" Sorry, sir——"

" You couldn't check ? " said Joe.

" No, sir. Yes, sir. I did. She's on it. I'm sorry, sir."

Joe looked at him. He was incredulously shocked. This sort of thing simply didn't happen ! Not to Doris and Bobby ! His voice sounded curiously sharp and urgent.

" What chances are there to get to Goose Bay ? "

" No other ship's due through tonight, sir," said the sergeant. He added awkwardly, " All the planes at Goose Bay will be hunting as soon as it's light in the morning, sir."

" Why didn't they start hunting before ? "

" It happened just after sundown, sir. They had trouble, but thought they'd make it, and didn't. They had plenty of warning, though. They were all set when they ditched."

" Oh," said Joe. The sergeant went away hastily. It's dark out there, thought Joe. I was there this afternoon. Now it's dark. Machines don't mind the dark, but Doris and Bobby are human. Somehow he felt all the sensations of a person on a rubber raft in inky night. Overcast. No stars. Icy, black, malicious waves coming out of nowhere. A child crying.

He went to Traffic and explained carefully," I don't want to be any trouble, but if any news comes through—"

" Yes, sir," said the sergeant. " I'll let you know right away."

He went back to the canteen. There wasn't anything to do except think about a raft on a black sea. In between thinking about the raft he saw pictures in his mind. Bobby piling coloured wooden blocks on top of each other. Doris hanging up curtains in some window, in some place where they'd been stationed. Bobby, asleep. Doris laughing at something unknown. Bobby climbing effortfully up into a chair.

Years passed before the grey dawn came. Traffic told him—it was another sergeant on duty, now—that the planes at Goose Bay were out searching for the ditched ship. A couple of destroyers were heading for the place, too. Visibility was not too good, but—

" Yes," said Joe, looking hard at nothing. " Yes. Thanks."

He went outside and walked in the cold grey light. He got his holdall after a while, and shaved very carefully. He made himself presentable and reported his arrival when the C.O. arrived at his office.

The C.O. beamed. " Glad to have you with us, Chalmers."

" An Army plane ditched last night," said Joe in a very rational voice. " My wife and son were on it. I'd like—"

" The situation's in hand," said the C.O. He was of a rank which is bad for the ego and the human touch.

" They're using four engined jobs for the search. That's not your line, Chalmers."

" I know," said Joe. " But—"

" We can count, confidently," said the C.O., " on news of a successful end to the search within hours."

" There's a south east breeze," said Joe. " At least there was as late as yesterday afternoon. That means mist."

" Come ! Come ! " said the C.O. heartily. He would be a better man and a kindlier one when he got promoted. " It's being handled by specialists ! If you want today to yourself, of course. But I'm very anxious to have your opinion—"

" I wouldn't mind," said Joe carefully, " not thinking."

He accompanied the C.O. They looked at the new jet plane. A part of his mind approved, detachedly. It gulped air here, churning it furiously with rotating blades that compressed it past all reason. Then a flame burned in a basket in the compressed air, heating so that it swelled enormously and poured out of the back in a roaring jet of almost incandescence.

As a photo-recon plane it had no armament, but it did have wingtip auxiliary fuel tanks. There was an automatic camera built into the fuselage. The ship had somehow an expression of urgent mechanical life.

Joe was the breath of that life. When he climbed into the

cockpit and fastened his safety belt, his body became part of the machinery of the plane. His eyes scanned the instrument board. There was an unfamiliar gadget and he asked—it was the camera control—and there was no need to ask anything else. He heard the jet engine catch and bellow in the fashion that is so completely unlike any other sound. It is the noise a dragon ought to make—a booming, throbbing roar of pure flame.

He released the brakes and settled his head against the headrest, and his hands moved this thing and that, with perfect mechanical precision ; and the plane became a streak of howling dust that raced across the field and then abruptly climbed at a preposterous angle. It rose faster than was at all believable, and in seconds it was a tiny speck that could not be picked out because it left its own roaring so far behind.

Joe's hands worked with exactness. He did not need to think about what he was doing. His body was a part of the plane. His mind just went along for the ride. But his mind was not especially interested when the plane levelled off and flung itself at the remote horizon with a sort of ravenous fury. The mach needle quivered up and up. Mach point six, point seven, point eight, eight and a half, nine. That was level flight at mach point nine—nine tenths of the speed of sound.

It was definitely not bad. But his mind noted the fact without satisfaction. He was thinking of something else.

After a time he went down in great, graceful, roaring swoops with a billowing vapour trail behind him. He dived to land at breathtaking speed. He landed with machinelike artistry, and cut the jet. In the monstrous silence which followed, he climbed out of the ship on to the concrete apron.

" A hot ship," said the C.O., beaming. " The hottest, eh ? "

" Yes," said Joe Chalmers. " Is there any word from Goose Bay ? "

The C.O. said something he intended to be confident and comforting about every possible effort being made. Joe looked at his watch.

At this time of year, days were short on the northern route from Europe. Where the Army plane had ditched, there'd be six hours of daylight, eighteen hours of dark. And there was no use hunting in the dark. The planes would be going back to Goose Bay now.

Doris and Bobby—if they were still alive—were in a rubber raft that reeled and bounced and sloshed itself full of icy water. They'd had time to get set for ditching—warm clothes and such. But they were seven hundred miles east of Goose Bay. Two

hundred from Cape Farewell, the southern tip of Greenland. It would be bad. Very bad.

He went to Traffic and heard the voices coming out of boxes. Regular traffic was heavy, but there was an occasional word from Goose Bay. It was not an encouraging word. Visibility was poor. Fifteen planes had gone out, but there were forty thousand square miles of ocean to be searched, and only so many hours of daylight. It added up to impossibility.

Night fell at this field. For a while there was still some activity. Ships appeared as serenely floating, unwinking lights—winking lights would mean passenger planes—which drifted across the sky with a thin droning sound. The field lights came on and they came down. They were very loud when they landed, and startlingly quiet thereafter.

I was fed up, thought Joe Chalmers, because I felt like a piece of machinery. What do I feel like now? People talked to him. You've got to be polite, he told himself, and asked, Why? to which there was no answer. But he continued to be polite.

Once when there were two men talking to him, one began to explain wisely that it was the mist which made the search hopeless for the planes from the Goose Bay field. If they had really good snooperscopes, he said, they'd penetrate the mist, because they see by infra-red light instead of visible light. There would be some hope then. The other man dragged him away.

Joe stopped going to Traffic after he saw pity in the eyes of a tech corporal. There was no sense in hoping for news while night still lay upon the waters where a rubber raft might float. It would be dawn there in six hours, but the Army ship had ditched thirty six hours before. It could have landed anywhere in a patch of sea seventy five miles wide and a hundred and fifty long. Afterwards, it would have drifted.

They'd have to search forty thousand square miles. And there was mist on the water, south east winds that blew over the Gulf Stream and afterwards made fog. You'd have to be straight overhead, nearly, to pick out a raft. A plane half a mile off the search pattern would miss the raft entirely. And it was night there again, now.

A voice said, "Orders for you, sir," and Joe said politely, "All right. Thanks."

He took the other sheet and looked at it. It said for him to take the new ship, the jet photo-recon plane, and head for Goose Bay. It was, of course, a mistake. At jet plane speed one can't hunt for a rubber raft even in bright sunshine. One travels too fast. At ten miles a minute and better one hasn't time to search. And there was the mist on the water. Of course.

I'll be at Goose Bay anyhow, he thought, for whatever good that

will be! He went to where the jet plane was being rolled out. He listened when somebody from Weather briefed him. It didn't mean anything. He got into the flying suit that went with the ship. Very gravely he filled out a flight plan. ETA—Estimated Time of Arrival—he set at a time that would be two hours before daybreak where Doris and Bobby would be.

It was marvellous, of course, that the world had such wonderful machines that in three hours, or thereabouts, he could arrive at complete futility some six or seven hundred miles from where his wife and small son tossed helplessly on cold dark waves.

He didn't need to think about the take off. He did all the needful things to get aloft with fine skill and without really noticing. He thought detachedly, Very useful, being a kind of machine. When you work like a machine you can spare your brain for thinking. You have time to wish you couldn't think. When the thought occurred to him he was already high above a world of night. The rumbling roar of the jet engine seemed to fill all the space between him and the stars.

It took him a shade over three hours to get to Goose Bay. He landed on the lit up field. Somebody came and greeted him with abstracted cordiality and led him to the canteen. Joe Chalmers realized that nobody here knew his wife and child were in the hoped-for raft that might have got away from the ditched plane—or might not. They'd taken him to the canteen for a refuelling operation like the one going on round the jet.

Somebody pontifically explained about the new Loran—Long Range Aerial Navigation. New gadgets would keep track of him. Greatly increased accuracy. Shore stations would send a signal to his plane, and the plane would receive it and quite automatically send it back on another wavelength.

There would be a specific time lag—like radar; it was radar turned inside out so it could use long wave lengths that would curve over the horizon—and all the time he was in the air they could spot him by triangulation with Gander. As accurate as radar itself, but longer range.

They'd have him pin-pointed within five hundred feet at five hundred miles. This was better than the old style Loran because they could use really bulky, really accurate apparatus on shore, instead of carrying it in the ship. He was expected to admire respectfully.

The new stuff is too valuable to risk in the air, he thought. But I can be risked.

A man from Photography came in, rubbing his hands. The jet's camera was loaded. The clock was set. The film was refrigerated. "Infra film," said the Photography man happily. "We keep

it in a refrigerator so it won't fog. You know how to start the camera ? "

Joe did. It had been an unfamiliar gadget on the control panel. He'd asked about it. The briefing stopped abruptly when the new Loran man looked at his watch.

" It'll be dawn out there in an hour and a half," he said briskly. " Your pattern will start "—he gave co-ordinates—" but we'll talk you into position from here and give you course changes as you go along. You can start now."

Joe put on the flying suit again and went out. He wouldn't navigate the jet plane. He'd just drive it. A voice in his headphones would tell him what course to fly and how long to fly it. He wouldn't be a man out there trying to find his wife and son. He'd be a machine flying a machine in response to orders sent him from five and six and seven hundred miles away.

He went up into the darkness to the east. His hands and body functioned neatly and accurately. There were stars overhead, very cold and spitefully amused. There was a streak of thin flame behind him. There was a thin roaring all about. A machine fed him with oxygen so he would continue to operate. Another machine fed electricity to wires in his flying suit so he would remain at the optimum temperature for efficiency.

A metallic voice in his earphones said, " Change course to o-three-seven degrees." He changed course to o-three-seven degrees. The voice said " Check."

He went on, numbly. He was very tired of feeling things and being alive. He was a pilot who was tops, and he was flying the best plane that had ever been made, and he felt sick and desperate and utterly futile. He flew on and on.

Presently he flew into light, but the world below him was still all blackness. He flew onwards into the light, and the extraordinarily shadowed mists below him began reluctantly to accept the dawn. The tinny voice in his ear said, " Very good ! The timing is very good ! " A man watching dials six hundred miles away approved of the readings of those dials.

The metallic voice came again, ordering changes of course to fractions of degrees. He obeyed. " Downstairs to fifteen thousand feet," commanded the voice, " and hold it. Turn on camera."

He did those things. He flew an exact course for fifteen minutes and the voice spoke, so he flew another exact course until the voice ordered another change. This went on indefinitely.

He wasn't a man trying to find and save his wife and son. He was very much less than that. But the man he had been, cursed all the machines in the world and cursed their makers from the

beginning of time, and particularly he cursed the men who had made an Army plane that fell into the sea and left a woman named Doris and a child named Bobby to die.

" All right," said his headphones. " Change course to two-nine-o and regain height and come on home. Perhaps we've got it."

He obeyed. He had flown for more than two hours at something over six hundred miles an hour, flying a geometrical pattern over mist that showed him nothing at all. He had flown a photo-recon plane with a camera in it. The camera was loaded with film, and every so many seconds its shutter clicked, and another film came into place, and the shutter clicked again. The pictures were taken by infra-red light—heat rays, which mist does not bend. The camera took pictures through the mist. Each picture included the image of a clock built into the camera.

The mist was spreading as he neared Goose Bay. He did not see the land or the mountains or anything but sky and ugly clouds. The machine voice gave instructions. In time he turned the nose of the ship down and went through opaque, fleecy stuff in which he saw even less than he had been seeing.

He obeyed orders in his earphones and presently there was Goose Bay below him, with its angular, minute buildings and the runways.

He landed, and there was a monstrous silence when the jet ceased to burn. Then there were small clanking, chuffing sounds as vehicles came rushing to him, and the man from Photography was extracting the film, anxiously noting its temperature, and putting it hastily into a refrigerated box.

As Joe Chalmers clambered out of the ship the new Loran man rubbed his hands together and said, " Have some coffee ? "

He went with Joe to the canteen very pleased with himself and talking brightly, but Joe did not pay attention because something inside his head said bitterly, The hell with it. Oh, the hell with it !

The Loran man seemed to feel that he had achieved a personal triumph, but Joe knew that the weather he'd seen making up was bound to overwhelm Doris and Bobby if by any chance they happened still to be alive.

Then, suddenly, the Photography man came for coffee.

" Found 'em," he said happily. " Beautifully clear ! On three separate exposures ! Two rafts ! We even counted the occupants ! All safe ! Everyone ! "

" I didn't see them," said Joe numbly.

" Naturally ! " said the man from Photography, expansively. " But we had the clock time of every exposure on the film, and the

Loran record of where you were every second. We know exactly where they were just "—he looked at his watch—" just an hour and forty five minutes ago ! "

" Then what're we waiting for ? " demanded Joe violently. " Come on ! For God's sake, let's get moving ! "

But the Photography man beamed again. " We had four Air Sea Rescue ships waiting out there with lifeboats ready to drop as soon as we got the rafts located. Now they know where to look. Shouldn't be long."

Joe couldn't sit still. He began to pace up and down. He did not feel like a machine. Sweat poured out of him. I paced like this, he thought, when Bobby was being born.

Then an enlisted man came in with a flimsy sheet. The Loran man read it aloud. " Dropped two lifeboats ; perfect drop within hundred yards. Both boats boarded. All all right."

Joe couldn't breathe. The Photography man and the Loran man slapped each other's shoulders, rejoicing selfishly in their achievement. They didn't know about Doris and Bobby.

Joe knew he couldn't tell them. He said in a queer voice, " Let's have some more coffee. I—I think I'll have some bacon and eggs, too. Now I come to think of it, I haven't eaten for a couple of days."

But it was curiously difficult to eat. He was hungry enough. But every so often it was simply impossible to swallow.

He was out there again at dawn the next morning, with the jet plane roaring thunderously. The boats sent rockets up out of the haze when they heard him, and he swooped down. He had a special small radio set to talk with them.

He said, " Lifeboats ! There are two destroyers heading for you. Your course should be one-nine-two degrees. They're about a hundred miles away. They'll pick you up ! "

A voice from the special radio said, " Right. Thanks . . . Say ! Are you Joe Chalmers ? "

And Joe said, " Yes."

Then he trembled, circling in empty sky above a mist that covered all the sea. But he knew that two lifeboats were down in the mist, sails fitted to stubby masts and small engines popping valiantly.

" Yes," he said. " I'm Joe Chalmers. Why ? "

" Somebody wants to talk to you," said the radio.

A child's squeaky, shrill voice said, " Hello daddy ! "

Then Doris' voice, warm and clear : " We're all right, Joe ! I knew you'd be hunting for us ! Joe, Bobby's you all over ! I bought him a toy at the last moment, and he's held it every minute since ! "

" Yes ? " said Joe. " Why's that me all over ? "

" It's a toy plane, Joe ! A rocket ! The kind he says is going to the moon ! "

Joe swallowed. Then he grinned proudly, circling in emptiness.

* * *

STIRRUP CUP

And our toast—The Ladies, God bless 'em ! Do you recognize them ? Count one point for the lady—or ladies—in the case, one for the source and one for the author, making a total of twenty seven points in all. The answers are on page 120.

1. *Dear old souls, out of the kindness of their hearts they took in friendless men, poisoned them, and interred the bodies in the cellar with appropriate rites.*
2. *" One did ought to be happy in a shop," she told the hapless young man beside her, and, putting his dreams by, for a while, he married the shrew.*
3. *When a wealthy young bachelor leased a house in the neighbourhood, it was a matter of interest to this ambitious mother with five unmarried daughters, and an unfortunate entail on the family estate.*
4. *She was probably too young to share in the contraband carried by those five and twenty ponies, trotting through the dark, but who can tell whether she obeyed the injunction to " watch the wall my darling," while the " Gentlemen " went by ?*
5. *It seemed impossible that she should love the conqueror of her land who wooed her in a language almost unintelligible to her—but his impetuous courtship won her heart.*
6. *" Aggerawayter," her unappreciative husband called her, but his sojourn in revolutionary France brought a change of heart and the hope that she might continue " flopping " for the rest of their life together.*
7. *Her ladyship discovered on the eve of her marriage that she was in fact " a beggar born " and not the daughter of an Earl. But her fond lover restored to her the title by marrying her next morning.*
8. *" A chieftain's daughter seemed the maid," to the stranger concealed in the undergrowth on the edge of Loch Katrine—and he was right, though her father suffered banishment.*
9. *" Is one more day so long to wait ? " this unhappy bride persuaded herself, but the days ran into years and she sat at her window till her lover the Duke was no more than a statue in the square below her.*

★*When one considers the happiness love has given to mankind, it is strange, as G. K. Chesterton once remarked, that none of the great traditional heroes and heroines, united by a supreme love, were ever wedded in a way entirely worthy of them. But here, in a little-known Hindu legend, Argosy introduces to the reader the story of a happy and satisfying marriage. It is told by Nivedita and Amanda K. Coomaraswamy.*

YAMA AND THE PRINCESS

A Hindu Love Story

THERE was a king named Lord-of-Horses; he was virtuous, generous, brave, and well-beloved. It grieved him much that he had no child. Therefore he observed hard vows and followed the rule of hermits. For eighteen years he made daily offerings to Fire, recited *mantras* in praise of Savitri, and ate a frugal meal at the sixth hour.

Then at last Savitri was pleased and revealed herself to him in visible form within the sacrificial fire. "I am well pleased," she said, "with thy asceticism, thy well-kept vows, thy veneration. Ask, great King, whatever boon thou wilt."

"Goddess," said the king, "may sons be born to me worthy of my race. If thou art pleased with me, I ask this boon."

Savitri replied: "O, king, knowing thy wish, I have spoken already with Brahma that thou should'st have sons. Through his favour there shall be born to thee a glorious daughter."

The king bowed down and prayed.

"So be it," he said, and Savitri vanished.

It was not long before his queen bore him a shining girl with lotus eyes. Forasmuch as she was the gift of the goddess Savitri, the wife of Brahma, she was named Savitri with all due ceremony, and she grew in grace and loveliness like unto Shri herself. Like a golden image the people thought her, saying: "A goddess has come amongst us." But none dared wed that lady of the lotus eyes, for the radiant splendour and the ardent spirit that were in her daunted every suitor.

One holiday, after her service to the gods, she came before her father with an offering of flowers. She touched his feet, and stood

at his side with folded hands. Then the king was sad, seeing his daughter of marriageable age and yet unwooed. He said to her: "My daughter, the time for thy bestowal has come; yet none seek thee. Do thou, therefore, choose for thyself a husband who shall be thy equal. Choose whom thou wilt; I shall reflect and give thee unto him, for a father that giveth not his daughter is disgraced."

Then Savitri meekly bowed to her father's feet and went forth with her attendants. Mounting a royal car she visited the forest hermitages of the sages.

Worshipping the feet of those several saints, she roamed through all the forests till she found her lord.

One day when her father sat in open court, conversing with the counsellors, Savitri returned, and seeing her father seated beside the rishi Narada, bowed to his feet and greeted him. Then Narada said: "Why dost thou delay to wed thy girl, who is of marriageable age?" The king replied: "It was for this that she went forth, and even now she returns. Hear whom she has chosen for her husband." So saying, he turned to Savitri, commanding her to relate all that had befallen her.

Standing with folded hands before the king and sage, she answered:

"There was a virtuous king of the Shalwas, Dyumatsena by name. He grew blind; then an ancient foe wrested the kingdom from his hands, and he, with his wife and little child, went forth into the woods, where he practised the austerities of a hermit life. The child, his son, grew up in that forest hermitage. He is worthy to be my husband; him have I accepted in my heart as lord."

Then Narada exclaimed: "Greatly amiss has Savitri done in taking for her lord this boy, whose name is Satyavan; albeit I know him well, and he excels in all good qualities. Even as a child he took delight in horses and would model them in clay or draw their pictures; wherefore he has been named Horse-painter."

The king asked: "Has this Prince Satyavan intelligence, forgiveness, courage, energy?" Narada replied: "In energy he is like the sun, in wisdom like Brihaspati, brave like the king of gods, forgiving as the earth herself. Likewise he is liberal, truthful, and fair to look upon?"

Then the king enquired again: "Tell me now what are his faults." Narada answered: "He hath one defect that overwhelms all his virtues, and that fault is irremediable. It is fated that he will die within a year."

Then the king addressed his daughter: "Do thou, O Savitri, fair girl, choose for thyself another lord; for thou hast heard the

words of Narada." But Savitri answered: "The die can fall but once; a daughter can only once be given away; once only may it be said: 'I give away!' Forsooth, be life short or long, be he virtuous or vicious, I have chosen my husband once for all. I shall not choose twice. A thing is first thought of in the heart, then it is spoken, then it is done; my mind is witness thereof."

Then Narada said to the king: "Thy daughter's heart is unwavering; she may not be turned from the right way. Moreover, none excelleth Satyavan in virtue; the marriage has my approval."

The king, with folded hands, answered again: "Whatsoever thou dost command is to be done."

Narada said again: "May peace attend the gift of Savitri. I shall now go on my ways; be it well with all." And therewith he ascended again to Heaven.

On an auspicious day King Lord-of-Horses with Savitri fared to the hermitage of Dyumatsena. Entering on foot, he found the royal sage seated in contemplation beneath a noble tree; him the king reverenced duly, with presents meet for holy men, and announced the purpose of his visit.

Dyumatsena answered: "But how may thy daughter, delicately nurtured, lead this hard forest life with us, practising austerity and following the rule of hermits?"

The king replied: "My daughter knoweth like myself, that happiness and sorrow come and go, and neither endures. Thou shouldst not disregard my offer."

It was arranged accordingly, and in the presence of the twice-born sages of the forest hermitages Savitri was given to Satyavan. When her father had departed, she laid aside her jewels and garbed herself in bark and brown.

She delighted all by her gentleness and self-denial, her generosity and sweet speech. But the words of Narada were ever present in her mind.

At length the hour appointed for the death of Satyavan approached. When he had but four days more to live, Savitri fasted day and night observing the penance of "Three Nights." By the third day Savitri was faint and weak, and she spent the last unhappy night in miserable reflections on her husband's coming death.

In the morning she fulfilled the usual rites, and came to stand before the Brahmans and her husband's father and mother, and they for her helping prayed that she might never be a widow.

Satyavan went out into the woods with axe in hand, suspecting nothing, to bring home wood for the sacrificial fire. Savitri prayed

to go with him, and he consented, if his parents also permitted it. She prayed them sweetly to allow it, saying that she could not bear to stay behind and that she desired exceedingly to see the blossoming trees.

Dyumatsena gave her leave, saying: "Since Savitri was given by her father to be my daughter-in-law I cannot remember that she has asked for anything at all. Now, therefore, let her prayer be granted. But do not," he added, "hinder Satyavan's sacred labour."

So Savitri departed with her lord, seeming to smile, but heavy-hearted; for, remembering Narada's words, she pictured him already dead. With half her heart she mourned, expectant of his end; with half she answered him with smiles, as they passed beside the sacred streams and goodly trees. Presently he fell to work, and as he hewed at the branches of the mighty tree he grew sick and faint, and came to his wife complaining that his head was racked with darting pains and that he would sleep awhile. Savitri sat on the ground and laid his head upon her lap; now was the appointed time of Satyavan's death. Immediately Savitri beheld a shining ruddy deity, dark and red of eye and terrible to look upon; he bore a noose in his hand. He stood and gazed at Satyavan.

Then Savitri rose and asked him humbly who he might be and what he sought to do.

"I am Yama, Lord of Death," he answered, "and I have come for Satyavan, whose appointed span of life is ended." So saying, Yama drew forth the soul from Satyavan's body, bound in the noose, and altogether helpless; therewith he departed toward the south, leaving the body cold and lifeless.

Savitri followed close; but Yama said: "Desist, O Savitri. Return, perform thy husband's funeral rites. Thou may'st come no farther."

But she answered: "Whither my lord is brought or goeth of his own will I shall follow; this is the lasting law. The way is open to me because of my obedience and virtue. Lo, the wise have said that friendship is sevenpaced. Relying on friendship thus contracted, I shall say thee somewhat more. Thou dost order me to follow another rule than that of wife; thou would'st make of me a widow, following not the domestic rule. But the four rules are for those who have not attained their purpose, true religious merit.

"It is otherwise with me; for I have reached the truth by fulfilment of the duty of a wife alone. It needs not to make of me a widow."

Yama replied: "Thou sayest well, and well thou pleasest me.

Ask now a boon, whatsoever thou wilt, except thy husband's life." She prayed that Dyumatsena should regain his sight and health, and Yama granted it.

Still Savitri would not return, saying that she would still follow her lord, and, besides, that friendship with the virtuous must ever bear good fruit. Yama admitted the truth of this, and granted her another boon.

She asked that her father-in-law should regain his kingdom. Yama gave his promise that it should be accomplished, and commanded Savitri to return.

Still she refused, and spoke of the duty of the great and good to protect and aid all those who seek their help. Yama then granted her a third boon, that her father-in-law should have a hundred sons.

Still Savitri persisted. "Thou art called the Lord of Justice," she said, "and men ever trust the righteous; for it is goodness of heart alone that inspireth the confidence of every creature."

When Yama granted another boon, save and except the life of Satyavan, Savitri prayed for a hundred sons born of herself and Satyavan.

Yama replied: "Thou shalt, O Lady, obtain a hundred sons, renowned and mighty, giving thee great delight. But thou hast come too far; now I pray thee to return."

But she again praised the righteous. "It is the righteous," she said, "who support the earth by their austere life; they protect all."

Again Yama was propitiated by Savitri's edifying words, and he granted another boon.

But now Savitri answered: "O giver of honour, what thou hast already granted cannot come to pass without union with my husband; therefore I ask his life together with other boons. Without him I am but dead, without him I do not even desire happiness. Thou hast given a hundred sons, and yet dost take away my lord, without whom I may not live. I ask his life, that thy words may be accomplished."

Then Yama yielded and gave back Satyavan, promising him prosperity and a life of four centuries, and descendants who should all be kings. Granting all that Savitri asked, the lord of the ancestors went his way.

Then Savitri returned to Satyavan's body, and she lifted his head upon her lap; behold, he came to life, like one returning home from sojourn in a strange land. "I have slept overlong," he said; "why did'st thou not awake me? Where is that dark being who would have carried me away?"

Savitri answered: "Thou has slept long. Yama has gone his way. Thou art recovered; rise, if thou canst, for night is falling."

Then those two returned through heavy night along the forest paths.

Meanwhile Dyumatsena and his wife and all the sages remained in grief. Yet the Brahmans were of good hope, for they deemed that Savitri's virtue must avail even against fate, and they gave words of comfort to the king. Moreover, Dyumatsena suddenly regained his sight, and all took this for an omen of good fortune, betokening the safety of Satyavan. Then Savitri and Satyavan returned through the dark night, and found the Brahmans and the king seated beside the fire. Warm was their welcome and keen the questioning; then Savitri related all that had befallen, and all saluted her; then, forasmuch as it was late, all went to their own abodes.

Next day at dawn there came ambassadors from Shalwa to say that the usurper had been slain, and the people invited Dyumatsena to return and be again their king.

So he returned to Shalwa and lived long; and he had a hundred sons.

Savitri and Satyavan had also the hundred sons bestowed by Yama. Thus did Savitri by her goodness alone raise from a poor estate to the highest fortune herself, her parents, and her lord, and all those descended from them.

* * *

WOODLAND BALLET

Twilight's shadow-show is made
Of shadow dancers' light on shade,
In arabesque divinely set
Or spinning in a pirouette.
The plaintive silvers of the rain
Are both the décor and refrain,
The tree musician bent and thin
Is shadow merged with violin . . .
Despite the wind's soft rolling drums
The ballerina never comes.
Just as one holds one's breath to bind
Her body's beauty to the mind,
The silence quivers and the spell
Breaks in another miracle,
Brown fans of starlings' wings that spread
In tangled whisper overhead.

MARION PEACOCK

MEET ME IN HAVANA

"Does it not show, my husband," she said softly, "that honesty is sometimes the best policy?"

by BURNHAM CARTER

IT was eleven o'clock on a bright Havana morning, and the marble-topped tables of the *Café Mosca* were already well filled. Most of the customers were regular patrons and were there for breakfast, their activities being largely nocturnal. They included Radich, the big Dutchman who had a motor launch scarred by United States Coastguard bullets; Olee Wang, an intermediary for the many Chinese in Cuba who yearned for United States citizenship; a former police informer called Hayo, useless now from over indulgence in opium and allowed to live; Nicky, the hatchet faced little drug pedlar; Sam, the American taxi driver, noisy but good natured; and Rosan, pock-marked and squat, who supplied the current revolutionary group with surplus American Army rifles. It was as good a collection of its kind as could be found in Havana, and Tio Martinez, the proprietor of the café, watched them from behind the bar with the pride of a man who has something his competitors lack.

Tio himself had once been an expert in Havana's underworld, a man who could operate on the management level where good men were scarce. When he had married the plump and pretty Amelia, several years ago, however, he had promised to abandon his illegal pursuits and become an honest restaurant keeper. He had kept this promise within reason, and Amelia was not unreasonable. Slender and always neatly dressed in a pale linen suit with a pink or blue shirt and flowered tie, Tio presided urbanely over the bar and cash register while Amelia took charge of the kitchen, and Pepe, her brother, dim witted, but religious, served the tables.

The front of the *Café Mosca* opened on one of the narrow streets in that part of Havana known as "the old city." At this hour the luncheon crowds were beginning to thread their way along the pavement, and from the stream a hatless young man darted aside suddenly, like a frightened fish, and paused in front of Tio, ready, as it seemed, to dart away again, if necessary.

"You are Tio Martinez?" he enquired, his pale, rather prominent eyes blinking behind his glasses.

"I am not the one to deny it," Tio replied.

" My name is Perada. José Vera sent me to see you. May I confer with you a few minutes alone ? "

José Vera was an old acquaintance of Tio's, an operator of various illegal enterprises. Tio's wife Amelia did not approve of him, nor did she approve of secret conferences in general, since they were inevitably concerned with matters foreign to honest restaurant keeping. Tio hesitated, but he was curious about this boy, who looked like a university student and was clearly not a professional.

" Go through that door at the back," he said.

When they were together in a small room behind the café proper, Tio enquired, " Where did you meet José Vera ? "

" In gaol."

" You were doubtless visiting ? "

" No." The boy spoke with pride. " I was in gaol for three months for illegal possession of arms. I am a member of a group fighting the dictatorships."

" Ah, yes." Several times in his life Tio had run into these boys, who were about to overthrow one government and install another.

" Why do you come to me ? " he asked.

" I have a treasure," Perada said. " It is worth very much. I do not know how to sell it. Perhaps you will sell it for me."

" A treasure ? "

" Yes. As you know, *señor*, when the English captured Havana in 1762, some of the Spanish grandees hid their money and jewels in caves outside the city. One of these I have found."

Tio looked incredulous. The folklore of Cuba was filled with legends of treasure left in a cave or buried on a quay either by the Spanish *conquistadóres*, or by the pirates that sailed the Spanish Main, or by the various administrators that looted the land, but, for the most part, these treasures had remained legendary.

" Spanish doubloons," the boy continued a little sharply, noting Tio's expression, " easily worth, on the basis of their gold content alone, twenty thousand dollars, and some jewellery worth much more. Under the law of treasure trove the government has title to it ; and while in practice half the value is usually awarded to the finder, we are out of favour and might receive nothing."

" Who is ' we ' ? "

" My friend, one Soto. He is a member of our group."

" Who else knows of this ? "

" No one. There was a third, but he is dead."

" How did that happen ? " Tio enquired.

" We do not know. He was found floating in the sea near Bahia Honda, eaten by shark and picuda."

Tio smiled. " Yes, it is always difficult to divide a treasure in three," he said.

The boy's face darkened. " You speak too fast, *señor*! The treasure is not to be divided. It is to be given to the cause. I do not know how this one died ; we think the police killed him."

Watching the boy's face, Tio decided that he was speaking honestly. " Such a treasure could not be sold here," he said. " It would be too conspicuous. It should be smuggled into the United States, where so much is stolen that forty or fifty thousand dollars is no great matter."

" Whatever you think best. We do not know about such things. We wish only the money."

Tio reflected a moment. This was undoubtedly an illegal enterprise, which would not meet with Amelia's favour. But, on the other hand, he considered it to be only technically illegal ; actually these men had found a treasure which was two hundred years old, and which was owned by no one ; and they merely wanted to sell it. He could arrange this for them with little difficulty or danger, and make a nice profit. Anyway, there could be no harm in investigating it further.

" I shall have to see this treasure," he stated.

" Can you come tonight ? If you will get yourself to Mariel, I will meet you there at the *Restaurant Martin*."

It was arranged. Perada departed, looking stern and resolved.

Returning to the bar, Tio found Amelia at the cash register. She had a look of brisk efficiency, but she was also an attractive woman, with her black glossy hair, intelligent dark eyes, red, slightly parting mouth, small and capable hands.

" Where have you been ? " she reproved him. " You should not leave Pepe in charge for so long."

" A man wished to see me, Little Flower."

" The light is as good in this room as any other."

" It is, now that you are here. But you were not here a few moments ago."

" It's a pity I wasn't," she replied, but there was a smile on her lips as she turned to give change to a customer. She was always charmed by Tio's small gallantries.

But later that day, when Tio told her he had to meet a man in Mariel, she demanded, " Oh, Tio ! What business is this ? "

" He is a student," Tio reassurred her. " I shall know more after I see him. Most likely it is only a revolution."

She looked at him questioningly with her dark eyes, and Tio, carefully adjusting his straw hat, felt a slight pang of conscience—an affliction which visited him rarely and which he quickly put aside as nothing serious.

Sam, the American taxi driver, warmed by the *Mosca's* rum, was waiting for him in his ancient car. The car jerked explosively down the Street of the Bishop and swung left on the wide avenue along the sea. Mariel was thirty five miles away, less than two hours drive along the central highway.

Down near its harbour, where the English fleet had anchored for the attack upon Havana nearly two hundred years ago, Perada was waiting for Tio in another car—a sedan of more modern construction. Sam was left behind to sample the rum of the cafés.

Under the velvety tropical night Perada's car continued west through long, undulating valleys, past the black mass of the mountain range, with the tall and stately palms springing like soldiers to attention under the headlights. After about an hour they turned on to a rough road—which had been built for mule wagons collecting the mangoes from the hundreds of trees on the mountain slope. They jolted along, following the course of a small river and crossing it when it plunged underground, as did many of the rivers in Cuba.

After a mile or so, Perada stopped and they got out. Down in the valley Tio could see the lights of a lone house.

" Soto lives there," Perada said. " But he waits for us ahead."

Guided by Perada's flashlight they continued on foot among the scrub trees and gigantic boulders of the higher reaches of the mountain. Tio was soon breathing hard. But he felt a rising excitement despite his sophistication in adventure. Where was the man who at some time in his life had not hoped to find a treasure in a cave ?

Perada paused and whistled twice, and there were two answering whistles from the blackness ahead. These schoolboys had arranged it according to the book, Tio thought. They moved on, and suddenly from the cavernous loom of a rock a voice challenged them, and a flashlight blazed in Tio's face. Tio swore.

" *Ola*, Soto ! " Perada called hastily.

" How goes it ? " the stranger acknowledged. " This is Tio Martinez ? "

" The same," Tio answered, blinking irritably into the glare. " And have the goodness to turn that light away from me, *señor*."

The light was extinguished. " Now kindly turn it on yourself," Tio requested. " I deal only with people whose faces I know."

" Deal with Perada then," Soto's voice growled, " and do not try to know too much."

The three proceeded another hundred yards to a nearly perpendicular cliff. They felt their way along this to a large bush which concealed a slit in the rock through which a man could barely squeeze. Inside there was a narrow passage descending sharply some twenty feet to a limestone floor. The air was damp and cool,

and there was a steady low murmur of rushing water. Perada wheeled the flashlight beam about them. They stood in a huge cave, big as a cathedral, the walls wet-black and tunnelling away into the darkness.

"*Ave Maria!*" Tio exclaimed. For the first time he felt a touch of fear, as if there were danger somewhere in this dark and mysterious cavern.

Beside him, he heard Perada's excited whisper; "You see how wonderful it is. And it is I who found it . . . by chance one day, looking for a hiding place for the guns. And I thought: Such a cave must have a secret. And so I found that too. Follow carefully."

They crossed the cave to a gaping hole in the floor ten feet wide. Far down it, the water stirred and gurgled, and squinted evilly at them. In the wall behind it, accessible only by a ledge a foot wide, someone a long time ago had cut a niche and hollowed out a cavity big enough to hold and conceal an iron-bound wooden chest three feet long. Under the flashlight the chest was mildewed and mottled with age and damp, but still solid—probably made of caoba or jiqui wood which not even two hundred years could rot. Only the two leather bags in it had rotted. As Perada lifted the lid, the Spanish coins had spread in a dull gold flood about the red and green and icy glitter of the gems.

Tio murmured under his breath. It was a sight no man would ever forget.

"So you see!" Perada announced triumphantly. "There is indeed a treasure! We have left it just as it was—"

He was interrupted by Soto's voice behind them, its loudness startling after their whispers, and reverberating in the cave. "Let him value what is there, with less chatter," Soto ordered.

"Give me the flashlight," Tio said.

He sifted the cool coins through his fingers, feeling a little of that tingling excitement that drives men mad—that drives them sometimes to murder. He picked up the jewels and turned them over. The gold he valued only for its worth as metal—thirty five dollars an ounce. As antique coins the pieces might bring much more, but that was difficult to arrange and impossible to predict.

As for the gems, he was not without experience in handling jewellery belonging to other people, and he could give a fairly close estimate of their value, both under and over the counter. He still had friends who were experienced in marketing such things.

Behind him, Soto's feet scraped restlessly, and Soto's harsh voice demanded, "What do you say, *señor*?"

Tio turned with the flashlight in his hand, and let the beam fall full upon Soto's face. The other swore and struck it aside, but Tio saw that, as he expected, this man was no student, like the other,

but older, harder; he had small, calculating eyes, a thickset, muscular body.

Tio flicked off the light and addressed the cursing Cuban, " Calm yourself, *señor* ! Your face is no worse to look at than mine. Yes, I can sell this treasure for you. But it goes from me to one in Havana, and from him to one in Miami, and from him to one from . . . anywhere. Each takes a risk, and each will selfishly demand a reward. It is only human nature."

" Never mind all that," Soto said. " How much do you pay ? "

" You will receive fifteen thousand dollars."

Soto snorted. " He insults us, Perada. He thinks us fools."

" Even so," Tio said with a flicker of a smile, " it is a fair price."

" That is final ? "

" That is final."

" Let us waste no more time then. Let us go."

The three men climbed out of the cave and proceeded down the mountainside in a silence even heavier than on their way in.

At the car, Soto turned to Tio. He stood close to him, peering through the darkness, but he did not again use his flashlight.

" *Señor*," Soto said, " once a man came here with a long tongue. It wags no more. I am confident you understand me."

" Among us thieves," Tio replied, " there are no long tongues."

Soto muttered and swung abruptly away into the darkness that stretched between the road and the lights of the house in the valley.

" He is sour, that one," Perada said. " He grows worse with time."

He got into the car indignantly, and he and Tio drove back towards Mariel.

" You would not pay us twenty thousand ? " Perada asked suddenly.

Tio might well have raised his offer, but the recollection of Amelia's dark, questioning eyes bothered him. Up to this point, he had, in a sense—in a special Tio sense—drifted into the situation ; there had been almost no effort on his part—no deliberate violation of his agreement with his spouse. One might say he had been forced into it. But if he offered twenty thousand dollars, he would be actively seeking the assignment. He could fairly be criticized.

Besides, he was quite sure it was unnecessary to do so. " Ah, my friend," he observed to his companion, " a humble restaurant keeper such as I cannot indulge himself in philanthropy as he would wish . . . even for so good a cause. Perhaps we had better forget this pleasant encounter."

" No," said Perada firmly. " I will accept your offer. We can wait no longer for money. Yes, I will speak again to Soto, and if he does not agree, I myself will bring the treasure to you."

" You speak like a man," Tio said, noting with a faint amusement the set of the beardless chin.

" I will bring it to Havana, on Tuesday night. I will telephone you at the *Mosca* when to meet me."

" I will be prepared for you."

That was two nights away. Tio consulted the next day with a friend experienced in marketing products of unknown origin. A satisfactory deal could undoubtedly be arranged, and Tio walked home through the Street of Pious Works, quieting his conscience by examining the shop windows for a subsequent gift to Amelia—one of those red silk, flowered Spanish shawls, perhaps, or a high comb of silver and tortoiseshell for her lustrous dark hair.

The *Mosca* was deserted in the mid afternoon, and all Havana seemed to be drowsing, but the paper-boys were fanning out through the city streets, as usual, with their afternoon papers, rousing the people once more to an interest in the passing show of life. This afternoon their cries had the happy exultation that comes from news of a sensational murder.

Tio had just bought a paper when the trim, broad shouldered figure of Captain Raoul Molina, of the Secret Police, cast its shadow across the *Mosca* bar. He was accompanied by Lieutenant Ortiz, a man of whom Tio had nothing but unpleasant recollections.

Ortiz merely grunted at Tio, but Captain Molina's greeting was hearty. " What a pleasure to see you, Tio ! "

" What an honour for me, captain ! "

" And how is your wife, the beautiful Amelia ? "

" She is well, and will be sad to find that you called during her absence."

" Ah. My compliments to her. Could we have a moment's private conversation, my friend ? "

Tio led the way to the back room, where the three men sat.

" You have read the afternoon papers ? " Captain Molina began, handing Tio one.

" My reading was deferred—and most happily—by your visit."

" Early this morning a charcoal boat sailing from Esperanza picked up the body of a young man about a quarter mile offshore. He was shot through the back of the head. He was in the water four or five hours, but strangely the fish had not eaten him."

Tio spread the newspaper on the table with a fearful premonition. It contained a picture of the body under a sheet, with the face visible. Yes, it was clearly the young man of his recent acquaintance. A promising venture was abruptly ended.

Tio's sigh was not entirely for the unfortunate deceased. " Ah, what a tragedy ! " he remarked. He glanced first at Molina and then

at Ortiz to see if they knew anything of his connection with Perada ; but Molina's face was bland and unaccusing, and Ortiz's little pig eyes were no more suspicious than they normally were.

" There are one or two regrettable circumstances connected with the event," the captain continued smoothly. " This boy—one Perada, a trouble-maker—had been in gaol before for plotting an armed attack on a neighbouring government. But the family is of some importance. And two months ago another body was found off the same coast section, also shot. We were unable to find the responsible party. Finally, since this Perada had been in trouble with the police, there are those who will say, if the crime is not solved, that the police may themselves have been involved in it."

" Only those ignorant of Havana's police would make such a statement ! " Tio declared indignantly.

Captain Molina acknowledged this with a graceful inclination of his head. " Frankly, we are under pressure, my friend, to solve this crime," he went on. " Perhaps you can help us. Presumably this young man was murdered in a boat or on the shore, and his body dumped into the sea. I know of no one in a better position than you to find out what happens along the waterfront. Of course, we could make enquiries ourselves, but your friends seldom respond to our efforts at conversation."

" They are shy."

" Perhaps so. Anyway, you see my point."

For the first time Ortiz entered the conversation. " Tell him about the reward," he said. The implication in his tone—that money was the only persuasion for such as Tio—pained the latter.

" Ah, yes," said Molina, " there is a reward of a thousand dollars for information leading to the arrest of the criminal."

" Of which the police should certainly receive part," observed Tio, who believed in clearing up such points in advance.

" No. It would all go to you."

" The police work for honour," Ortiz reminded Tio, " while others work for profit."

" It is so," Tio replied. " Every man works for what he does not have."

The lieutenant glared, but Captain Molina laughed. " Well, what do you say, my friend ? "

The offer was interesting. It had the rare advantage of being one to which Amelia would not object. Indeed, in assisting the police, it positively glowed with virtue. Also, Tio would not mind catching the man who had spoiled his promising enterprise.

" I am always eager to co-operate with the police," he declared. " I shall do what I can. Tell me, captain, what your investigations have found so far."

The captain did so. "There was only one acquaintance of Perada's who appeared of interest," he concluded. "One Soto—also a malcontent, but with nothing definite against him. Perada had been seeing a good deal of Soto recently. But we know for a fact that Soto did not leave his house for more than an hour during the possible period of the crime, and it would have taken him several hours, on the winding country roads, to make the trip to and from the point where the body was discovered. We have virtually eliminated Soto as a suspect. It is an open field for you, *señor*."

Amelia was gratified to learn later that afternoon of Tio's co-operation with the police and made no objection to his departure for Bahia Honda, a small harbour village near where the body had been found.

Some years ago, before Tio had met Amelia, he had spent a good deal of time at Bahia Honda and adjacent points, running rum and other liquors to the Florida quays and fishing in his idle hours. Those happy days were no more, but Tio retained his acquaintance with some of the discreet and well informed in the villages, who always took note of the arrival of strangers and knew what boats came in and out of the harbour.

They were unable to report to him anything that threw light on the Perada matter, although there was plenty of gossip. The villagers were naturally proud of the sudden prominence of their area in the newspapers after a century of neglect.

All of the rumours were, for one good reason or another, discarded by Tio. He drank a great deal of coffee and sipped a little rum—he was abstemious in respect of alcoholic beverages—before he concluded that there were no reliable witnesses to the crime along the waterfront. He decided to visit the spot where the body was found—Molina had given him the location—and early the next morning he hired a launch and set out down the long harbour.

It was one of those perfect Cuban mornings with the air like silk and a soft brightness over the land. The sea was a clear blue and the sky of the same cloudless colour, of a lighter tone. His little boat chugged through the quiet harbour waters and turned the point into the open sea. The world was a vast blue dome flooded with golden light, and Cuba was its emerald jewel. Tio laughed and stretched and regarded the scene affectionately, his mind lazy with memories. He knew this coast so well.

Here in the secretive night he had waited in a rocking boat for the signal flash of the schooner, which would send him roaring across the black water with his illegal cargo; here he and José Vera had dumped twenty cases of good Cuban rum when a coast-guard searchlight had put its finger on them; here he had fished

for long hours in the sun, waiting for the night to fall—he had caught a fish without eyes—there where the bubbles were rising to the surface of the sea, at the spot where the body had been found. It was strange that after several hours the body should have been untouched by shark and picuda, always ravenous for dead human flesh. The bubbles popped and bloomed quietly in the limpid water, catching a glitter from the sun.

Tio watched them and remembered the odd blank look of the fish without eyes, and thought of the unravaged body . . . and suddenly his mind sat up, flooded bright with understanding of what these things meant. Yes, yes, of course, that was it. He was quite sure. He started the engine and chugged rapidly back to the harbour, passing a lone and somewhat aimless fisherman in a boat.

It was his intention to telephone Captain Molina in Havana and ask him to come out to the village. But the handsome captain was already there, chatting with the local policeman on the quay.

" There has been an interesting development here," the captain informed Tio. " Perhaps I failed to tell you that we had Soto under surveillance ? "

" You did. And me as well ? That fisherman, perhaps ? "

The captain made a deprecating motion of his hand. " It was Ortiz's idea. A careful man, he leaves no stone unturned. In your case it was a mere formality. But with Soto it seems to have been more than that. Ortiz and a detective trailed him to a point in the mountainside where Soto disappeared, presumably into a cave. Ortiz followed him, bidding the detective wait and watch. That was three or four hours ago, and neither Ortiz nor Soto has re-appeared. The detective returned for more men, and they are now searching the area. I am about to go out there to see what the searchers have found. Would you care to come ? "

Tio shook his head slowly. " I do not think you will find Ortiz there, captain. But I think I can take you to him. And by boat."

Molina's cool appraising eyes rested on Tio's face. He had learned to respect Tio's judgment and resourcefulness as only slightly inferior to his own—which was the highest rating he could give—and after a moment of silence he followed Tio to the motorboat, which chugged once more out of the harbour, passing the same aimless and now puzzled fisherman coming in.

Under the benign sunlight, with the bright blue water about him, the captain relaxed and smoked a cigarette, deferring his questions. Tio guided the boat along the coast to the place of the bubbles, where he shut off the engine.

" We shall wait here," he said.

" You expect Ortiz to meet us here ? " Molina enquired calmly.

" Yes."

" How soon ? "

" It was four hours ago, you say, that he entered the cave ? Then he should be here any moment now."

" Will he come by boat or by air ? " There was a faint sarcasm in the captain's voice.

" He will come by water."

" Ah. He should have an interesting story."

" He will be unable to tell it. He will, I fear, be dead."

Captain Molina spun the butt of his cigarette into the sea. " I confess you provoke my curiosity," he observed.

" Let us put three things together, captain," Tio said. " First, the bodies of two murdered men are found in this area—one at this very spot, fresh and unbitten. How did they get here ? The waterfront knows nothing of them. In the case of Perada, we know that he consorted with Soto, by all reports a questionable character. But Soto did not come to the waterfront. Second, as you know, many Cuban rivers go underground, emerging from the ocean floor ; and at such places the water is brackish, and bubbles are seen . . . as here. These two facts came to my mind, and you, captain, supplied the link between them. The cave ! The murderer is Soto. The underground river flows through the cave. The bodies come out here, too far away to implicate the killer. At first, he probably did not expect them to appear at all ! But how ingenious ! How remarkably efficient a disposal ! "

" It is, indeed. And a motive ? "

" In the village there are rumours of a treasure," Tio answered, inventing them. " Traditionally a bloody business. But we shall see. And your Ortiz, if I am right—as you say, he leaves no stone unturned—follows Soto into the cave. And you and I wait for him here, under the innocent sky."

Hardened as he was to violence, Molina twitched slightly and glanced about him at the blue water. The two men sat silent in the warm sun. A few yards away, the bubbles rose gently, rode for an instant on the slight heave of the sea, and burst. Farther out, a big brown sea turtle lay asleep on the water, and beyond that a three-masted schooner hung motionless against the horizon.

Suddenly Captain Molina gave an exclamation. About fifty yards away from them, a human body bobbed to the surface, sank and reappeared, face downwards. Tio started the engine and drove the boat there, catching the clothing with a boat hook just as the body started to sink again. They dragged it on board and rolled it over. It was Soto.

Molina swore. The two men stared at the corpse. The side of the head had been broken by some blunt instrument.

" And where, then, is Lieutenant Ortiz ? " Molina exclaimed.

Tio gave a short and mirthless laugh. " He is even now explaining to your men how he followed Soto into the cave and the latter disappeared."

" There is an insinuation in your voice."

" It is very clear," Tio declared. " Soto murdered Perada. Ortiz murdered Soto. And why ? For a treasure in a cave."

" That is a serious charge," Captain Molina stated sternly.

Tio shrugged and drove the launch back to the village, where their arrival with a third corpse naturally created a sensation.

Ortiz was there with the other policemen, as Tio had predicted ; his astonishment at sight of Soto's body was genuine, if uneasy.

" We struggled in the cave," he said, " and Soto broke from me and ran outside."

Captain Molina did not stop to explain about the underground river. " We shall explore the cave," he said.

" Tomorrow ? " Ortiz suggested. " It is too late today; we cannot get there before dark."

" Today," Tio said. " It is dark in a cave at any hour."

There was a baleful look in Ortiz's eyes.

" Today," Molina decided.

Accompanied by two detectives, the three made the strenuous trip to the cave with little conversation. Once inside, the narrow beams of their flashlights cut paths into the ugly blackness, hovered palely on the wet walls, fingered the gaping hole where the water gurgled and swirled and rushed beneath the earth.

Tio started to walk along the ledge near the wall, and Ortiz grabbed his arm. " Do not go so near," he growled.

" It is dangerous," Tio agreed, " but not to me." He proceeded along the ledge, turned his flashlight into the aperture in the wall, opened the wooden chest and gazed once more upon the gold and jewels gleaming there. Molina, at his side, whistled softly.

" It is for this that Soto killed Perada," Tio explained dispassionately, " and it is for this that Ortiz killed Soto."

" It is a lie ! " Ortiz shouted from the other side of the hole.

" Ortiz found him inspecting his treasure," Tio continued. " He struck him with his gun and dropped him down the water hole. Tonight he would have returned to collect. As you say, he leaves no stone unturned."

" It is a lie ! " Ortiz shouted again. " I did not know the jewels were there until now ! "

" Then how do you know they are here now," Molina enquired, " since you cannot see them from where you are ? " He turned to the detectives. " Arrest him and take him outside."

Left alone, Tio and Molina remained staring into the chest.

" You have done well, my friend," Molina remarked abstractedly. " The one thousand dollars will be promptly paid."

" Thank you, captain." Tio picked up a brooch composed of a ruby set in a heart shaped frame of engraved gold. It would look well on Amelia, who had a passion, as yet ungratified, for rubies. " I suppose all this will now belong to the government ? " Tio asked.

" Yes."

Tio sighed and put the ruby back.

Twenty feet below the narrow ledge where they stood flowed the secret and sinister water. A slip of the foot, an accidental jostle, and a man would vanish—as three had done already—whisked under the rock, throttled by the black water, vomited into the sea for the shark. Tio shuddered. He had the impression that the same thought had occurred to Molina ; there was a peculiar glint in Molina's eyes, as if the glitter of the gold had lodged there ; as if, without witnesses, some of it—

" Let us move this to a safer location," Tio suggested hastily.

It was a happy coincidence that Molina was so placed as to take the front end of the chest, facing outwards, while Tio took the rear. It was heavy, but Tio was able, for an essential moment, to hold it with one hand as they carried it outside.

That night the *Café Mosca* was closed at the dinner hour, and its patrons resorted grumblingly to less sympathetic restaurants. Tio and Amelia were dining in an expensive hotel, and Amelia was wearing a pale green dress with a ruby brooch.

" Who would have expected that the government would reward us both ! " Amelia exclaimed happily. " But does it not prove, Tio, that honesty is the best policy ? "

" You are right, Little Flower," Tio answered humbly.

* * *

IN SOLUTION

An American soap salesman was showing a British representative of the firm over his twelve roomed house, furnished entirely, he owned proudly, with premiums redeemed from soap coupons.

" We go for it in a big way over here," he admitted, happily commenting on how many coupons each chair, table, or carpet had cost.

At the end of his tour the visitor said : " But you've shown me only five of the twelve rooms. What about the other seven ? "

" Oh those," shrugged the householder indifferently. " Why, that's where we keep the soap ! " *Coronet*

NOCTURNE

The Night walked down the sky
With the moon in her hand

F. L. KNOWLES, 1869-1905

The wind died down at sunset. Half a ring of moon hangs in the hollow air. It is very quiet. Somewhere I can hear a woman crooning a song. Perhaps she is crouched before the stove in the corridor, for it is the kind of song that a woman sings before a fire—brooding, warm, sleepy, and safe. I see a little house with flower patches under the windows and the soft mass of a haystack at the back. The fowls have all gone to roost—they are woolly blurs on the perches. The pony is in the stable with a cloth on. The dog lies in the kennel, his head on his forepaws. The cat sits up beside the woman, her tail tucked in, and the man, still young and careless, comes climbing up the back road. Suddenly a spot of light shows in the window and on the pansy bed below, and he walks quicker, whistling.

KATHERINE MANSFIELD, *Journal*, November, 1915

Silver Doorway

The full and yellow moon has just come over
The side of the world and is tangled in bare trees,
It is larger than the houses it has darkened,
It is closer than the lamplight at their panes.
The men are going home, their words and laughter
Stay after them and melt into the moon . . .

What can the women do who set the plates out
Under the lesser moons of lamps to keep
Their menfolk steady fathers of good sons?
Women live always in small, narrow houses,
Keep themselves warm and wary, counting things.
But he-ones whom the women have created,
Because the moon made tides and women so,
Are cold and wide and multitudinous things.
They go in and out of day and night-time,
Blow hot and cold, walk like the sons of seraphs
And spring on life like bullocks in the pen.
Waste their substance as the thistle wastes its seedlings,
And snow-white strength and wonder on the world,
They go in the silver doorway of the moon.

ROBERT P. TRISTRAM COFFIN

Moon-Fever

" 'Tis a strange thing what a wonderful great power the moon's got to control and draw human beings to her, like as her do draw the tides of the sea. You may not believe it, but some quiet-going folk as don't seem as if nothing ever moves them, goes quite queer in their minds at the turn of the moon.

" What be the turn of the moon, do you ask ?

" Why, the time betwixt the old moon's fading away and the new moon's up-rising, for sure. If folks only knowed how the moon do draw the tides inside of we and raise them up out of our own control, they'd take more care of theyselves at such a time.

" Us have strong, fast-running swashways in our blood and contrary currents what will rise up of a sudden and threaten to destroy everything, 'specially if us be of mixed blood . . . Turn of the moon and full of the moon—them's the times when all of we should take care."

Romany Belief, told by a gypsy in the New Forest

Through a Glass Darkly

Was it the sound of a footfall I heard
On the cold flag stone ?
Or the cry of a wandering far night bird,
On the sea-winds blown ?
Was that a human shape that stood
In the shadow below ?
Or but the mist of the moonlit wood
As it hovered low ?
Was it the voice of a child that called
From the hillside steep ?
Or, Oh, but the wind as it softly lulled
The world to sleep ?

ELIZABETH RAMAL

Reflets Dans L'Eau

By the outer margin of the pit was an oval pond, and over it hung the attenuated skeleton of a chrome-yellow moon, which had only a few days to last—the morning star dogging her on the left hand. The pool glittered like a dead man's eye, and as the world awoke a breeze blew, shaking and elongating the reflection of the moon without breaking it, and turning the image of the star to a phosphoric streak upon the water . . .

THOMAS HARDY, 1840–1928, *Desperate Remedies*

Curfew

Voices moving about in the quiet house :
Thud of feet and a muffled shutting of doors :
Everyone yawning. Only the clocks are alert.

Out in the night there's autumn-smelling gloom
Crowded with whispering trees ; across the park
A hollow cry of hounds like lonely bells :
And I know that the clouds are moving across the moon ;
The low, red, rising moon. Now herons call
And wrangle by their pool ; and hooting owls
Sail from the wood above pale stooks of oats . . .

Falling asleep . . . the herons and the hounds . . .
September in the darkness ; and the world
I've known ; all fading past me into peace.

SIEGFRIED SASSOON

The Crown of Moons

At the determined hour the angel of meeting led Jasmine along the path to Almond's garden. He scaled the walls into this fragment of Paradise, just as the sun was sinking in the western haze and the moon showed her face below the veils of the East. He walked, as lightly as a fawn, to a certain tree which the young confidant had described, and hid himself in the branches.

Princess Almond came with night into the garden. She was dressed in blue and held a blue rose in her hand. She trembled like the leaves of a willow, as she lifted her head towards the tree ; she could not determine whether she saw the full moon caught in the branches or whether Jasmine waited for her there. But soon, as a flower ripened by desire, a fruit heavy with its precious weight, the boy slipped from the branches, and covered the pale feet of the princess with his violet-tendrilled hair. She recognized her dream and found the truth of its image fairer. Jasmine saw that the darwish had not lied, and that this moon was the crown of moons . . .

The Tender Tale of Prince Jasmine and Princess Almond, translated from the French of Dr. J. C. Mardrus by E. POWYS MATHERS

Love-Sight

Let sailors gaze on Stars, and Moon so freshly shining ;
Let them that miss the way be guided by the light ;
I know my Lady's bower, there needs no more divining ;
Affection sees in dark, and Love hath eyes by night.

Author Unknown, from *The Phoenix' Nest*, 1593

NO HEAD FOR HEIGHTS

The most daring invention he had tried so far, and strangely, the most successful

by CLIVE BURNLEY

"THE name of Francis Rankinson," said Francis Rankinson, "will this day become the most famous among men."

So much he said, in the sixth year of Victoria's reign, while he was standing on the roof of Hayward's Hall, which he had a perfect right to do, as it was his. But plainly something went wrong, for the chances are, unless you come from Garnsworthy, or Dumpleton, or Snagge Green, that you have never heard of Francis Rankinson at all.

If that is so, it is a pity; and I will put it right, and tell you about him, at once.

The Rankinsons had lived and bred at Hayward's Hall since the days of the Conqueror, according to their own account. This one was beheaded, and that one impeached, and this other fell at Agincourt, but for all that they had gone on, heir after heir, until now they had reached this one rare and perhaps final result.

The generating of all these generations had eventually produced only Sir Francis, whom we now see, at forty five years of age, unexceptional in his rather chubby face and figure, or in his blue coat and trousers strapping under the shoe, or in his partial baldness, or the dimple in his chin—quite unexceptional, except for the light of enthusiasm shining out of his eyes. It was that glow which comes to the eyes of children and glimmers there so brightly whilst they are learning, and then, one day when they learn too much, goes out.

With Sir Francis it had never gone out; the schoolboy zest shone in his eyes. It shone nowhere else at Hayward's Hall, for there were no other schoolboys—no more heirs, no more Rankinsons at all. It had come in fact, to failure of the Direct Line, largely because throughout his forty five years the enthusiasms of Sir Francis, rapidly succeeding one another, had sent him hither and thither about the physical and philosophical worlds like a billiard ball careering round a table from cushion to cushion, still travelling, and avoiding all kinds of pockets.

No direct heirs; there was only occasionally in residence a very thin, very blond young man with a white straight smile like a knife blade, who was a nephew. This man, one Bernard Rodd, to whom, not without an infrequent and quickly suppressed twinge, Sir Francis, had already made over, in his will, the inheritance of the Rankinsons.

It was an inheritance of some consequence; Hayward's Hall with its new west wing which later generations, who had never seen its white stucco gleaming, were to condemn as an eyesore, with its two hundred acre park, landscaped about the crescent shaped lake, and its mock Gothic ruin on Hammer Hill. The Hall also boasted twenty three tenant farmers, the entire village of Dumpleton, some of the best preserved shooting in the country, and that glorious view from the west windows across woods and wolds and water to the distant spire of Garnsworthy church.

Blessed with all this, Sir Francis had long obstinately sought blessings elsewhere, from his earliest taste of the Grand Tour until eighteen months ago. He had spent his time in chasing wild geese wherever he had word of their honking; equipping yachts to search for St. Brendan's Isle; building in Bridgeport a Sub-aqueous Ship—now subaqueous indeed, at the bottom of Long Island Sound; supervising in France the construction of his famous Summer Carriage, which was built to take the horses inside the body of the coach and the passengers on the roof, so that it appeared to be going along without visible means of locomotion—so far as it went at all, which was no more than three and a half miles, thereafter becoming a pile of matchwood in a ditch.

He had tried out his scheme for planting trees on mountainsides by firing fir cones from a cannon on the Alps; made surveys at Gibraltar for his project of damming the Straits and pumping out most of the Mediterranean into the Atlantic; ascended a Scottish peak in a balloon secured to a ropeway running to the summit, to prove that mountaineering could be effortless, and that even the aged and delicate could watch dawn from the top of Ben Nevis; perfected on Thames-side his Convict Barge, in which felons, instead of uselessly expending their energy in prisons, walked upon a treadmill which was really a large paddle wheel, thereby propelling the boat, and saving horse-hire on the canals; led an expedition into the African desert in search of a Lost City; planted trees in Virginia to prove that by careful pruning they could be made to *grow* into a log cabin, thus saving a great deal of work in making one. This experiment took too long to complete.

Even occasionally Sir Francis produced something really in advance of his time, like the Improved Wind Engine he made in

the West Indies, or the Sectional Ship he built in Quebec, the crew of which could clean underwater fouling without their vessel being docked or careened. Only for brief periods, during his scurrying hither and thither on these and countless other projects, was Sir Francis ever at Hayward's Hall, but now—perhaps it was a sign of his years—he had rediscovered the house, and found, to his amazement, that it was a better place to experiment in than a borrowed warehouse at Wapping, or a Saharan oasis, or any of the other outlandish workshop sites he had used.

So here, surrounded by luxury, and attended constantly by Bernard Rodd, who appeared to throw his timid heart and obsequious soul completely into the work in hand, not being above doing some of the rough carpentry with his own fingers, Sir Francis in his forty sixth year set about that great work which was to make his the most famous of names.

In the spacious Long Gallery at Hayward's Hall, in an atmosphere of industry and secrecy the great work went forward. Sir Francis had already spent several weeks of daylight in his coverts, shooting birds, the corpses of many of which he had dissected in the Long Gallery with a scalpel, and he had borrowed from the *Rankinson Arms* at Dumpleton the landlord's most prized possession—a golden eagle, naturalistically stuffed as if in flight—which he had minutely studied.

The result of all this research was slow to appear, and its object was never announced. The servants long debated among themselves "what old Frankie was up to," and whenever a bell had summoned one of them to the Long Gallery he or she returned with more information on which to base fresh conjecture. Enough feathers to stuff fifty pillows, and reels of shiny wire, and strange curving shapes in steamed wood—what could it be?

One day young Mary Gilbert went up to the Long Gallery to take the two scientists the bottle-and-bite they had ordered for mid-morning. Mary Gilbert had started out to be a governess but was now glad to be a general servant.

She had eyes both warm and wary, this Miss Gilbert, and she had other attractions unseemly in a governess. Matrons, duennas, housekeepers bridled at the sight of her comeliness, and would not dream of employing such a minx, however accomplished, to teach their children; butler's wives frowned upon her even as a scullion. It was only in a bachelor establishment like that at Hayward's Hall, where women and partridges were not held to be of much account, that she could find a place as fetcher, carrier, sweeper and cleaner. Even there, of course, she upset the footmen, but was it her fault?

She came down that morning from the Long Gallery and said to Preeble, the butler, " I know—it's a Flying Machine."

In this, as it happens, she was correct. During a particularly unpleasant Channel crossing, some years earlier, Sir Francis had biliously envied the seagulls, who rode the stiff breeze as smoothly as skaters on a frozen pond, and that little seed of envy planted within him had eventually sprung up as a bizarre and vigorous weed—an Enthusiasm. So many men had tried to fly, making for themselves cumbersome and unwieldy machines according to certain principles which they believed they had discovered; but to Sir Francis the thing was much simpler than that. Nothing more was needed, he saw quite clearly, than to take an existing machine that did fly—in his case it was the common partridge somewhat modified by the stuffed eagle from the *Rankinson Arms* and simply scale it up, inch for inch and pound for pound, until it was approximately five feet nine inches tall, as he was, and weighed twelve stones, as he did.

To the same proportions you build your wings, using wire for sinew and wood for bone, where necessary, and ingeniously covering the whole with borrowed feathers; you add a tail of the required dimensions; and after that, of course, all you need to do, if you have the same divine confidence as Sir Francis Rankinson, is to leap into the void from the southwest corner of the new wing at Hayward's Hall.

Which is what he did. Merely as a trial, to give himself the feel of the thing, before later staging a public demonstration to which he planned to invite the Lord-Lieutenant of the county, the member for Hossex South, and the Bishop of Bewcastle, with whom he had been at college.

For the trial there were to be no official spectators except, of course, the invaluable Mr. Bernard Rodd.

The test was made on a spring morning—on Monday the twenty seventh of March, 1843, if you wish me to be precise—a morning glowing with sunshine so clear and thin that it plainly came from a new sun altogether and not the tired and bloodshot one that had been shining during the winter. It was a morning ideally adapted for Enthusiasms of all sorts, such a one as sends all schoolboys skipping out joyfully to play.

To understand what followed it is necessary that I should explain exactly where the test was made. The new wing was surrounded, at roof height, by a two foot parapet, behind which, at some little distance rose the pitch of the roof, in which, set so low as to command a view of hardly anything except the parapet and a strip of sky, were a row of dormer windows. It was from

one of these windows that this aspiring Man-Bird climbed on to the roof; as for Mr. Rodd, he remained at the window, and came no farther.

"You know *I* have no head for heights," he said, conveying in his tone yet once more his admiration for one who had. Bernard Rodd's skilful adulation made Sir Francis feel rather as Cæsar and Isaac Newton might have done, supposing they had been one person, instead of two.

Sir Francis climbed on to the parapet, fifty eight feet above the terrace below, and stood there, looking, apart from his trousers and patent leather boots, exactly like something out of Greek mythology; spreading his vast pinions, and extending—by a cunning control wire fixed to his toes—his gigantic tail.

"*I'm off!*" *he cried.* "*Here I go!*"

And there he went. Bernard Rodd saw him go. He plunged over the parapet. There was a cry, and a great crash. Rodd dared not go from his window across the treacherous slate to the parapet, to peer over and see what had happened; instead he turned into the house and began running furiously down flights of stairs.

In the meantime Sir Francis was intensely surprised.

He had been surprised when the Subaqueous ship had persisted in its subaqueousness, and when the Summer Carriage had been kicked to pieces by indignant horses; but on this occasion, perhaps because he was getting older, he was more surprised than ever before. But how was he able, in face of the immutability of natural laws, to feel surprise at all?

In this way. The corner of the new wing from which Sir Francis had leaped adjoins the older building, which is, however, lower, being a mere thirty feet or so high. Its roofs were, consequently, invisible from Rodd's dormer window; moreover, they were old roofs, sound enough in Elizabeth's reign, but now much bored into by beetles.

And although Sir Francis had, the moment before he leaped, gazed out over that wonderful panorama of wood and wold and water, and noted the exact position of Garnsworthy church steeple, up to and around which he designed to fly, and had set off, as he thought, in that general direction, two fortunate circumstances had altered his course and, without a doubt, saved his life.

One was a frolicsome March wind, which had decided to frolic at exactly the right moment, and the other was the fact that his tail was caught, for a second or so, in the rainwater head on top of one of the down-pipes from the gutter. The result was that the wind whipped him round the corner of the building while he hung by his tail, and flung him on to the roof of the older part of the house;

which was in no condition to have anything heavier than hailstones flung upon it.

So the roof after only enough reluctance to break his fall, parted in all directions and allowed him to slide gently into that long disused room which was still called the Nursery, because once, when the Rankinsons had a use for such a room, they had so used it. Sir Francis hadn't been in it since he was seven.

A couple of rooms away Mary Gilbert was polishing fire-irons. The noise brought her running. She saw Sir Francis slowly standing up out of a heap of fallen plaster and broken laths. He slowly stood up, dangling his wings, while dust swirled about him like smoke.

"Lord have mercy!" cried Mary Gilbert. "The Evil One!"

Sir Francis said nothing; he was counting his bones.

"Get thee behind me!" cried Mary Gilbert. "I'm a God-fearing Christian woman, and I defy thee! Avaunt!"

"I've avaunted enough," said Sir Francis, "for one morning. Look, girl, is my head bleeding, there by the ear?"

"Save us!" cried Mary Gilbert. "It's the master!"

"I'll take it kindly," said Sir Francis, "if you'll tell me if my head is bleeding."

"It is indeed, sir. But it's only a nick in the ear." There was linen to hand and water in a ewer, and she set about bathing the wound. This was difficult because in the meantime Sir Francis was struggling out of his wings.

"The mixture was wrong," he said. "It was that damned eagle from the inn—if I'd stuck to the partridge I'd have been right enough. Or perhaps I had the tail too high. It'll cost all of thirty pounds to mend that roof."

"I knew it was a Flying Machine," said Mary, half to herself, "all along. Soon as I saw those feathers, up in the Long Gallery—I beg pardon, sir."

"It was not," said Sir Francis, "a *flying* machine. I thought it was, as well. But we were both wrong. And what do you say, my girl? D'you think God intended Man to fly?"

"I hardly know, sir. But He certainly meant to make it difficult. It's a pleasure that belongs to the angels, after all."

"There's Mr. Rodd," said Sir Francis looking down from the window. "Go down and tell him what's happened. I'll stay here and feel my bruises."

The girl went down as she was bidden.

Bernard Rodd was standing at the corner of the Terrace, with a peculiar expression on his face; vacant and pained, with all his

blond hair disordered into what may well have been a thousand question marks, for it had that sort of curl.

"If you're looking for Sir Francis, sir," said Mary Gilbert, "I think he's gone to Garnsworthy. He was *going* that way."

"What!"

She glowed; a simple trick, but one of her accomplishments.

"Isn't it wonderful, sir? I knew it'd work! Flying like a bird, straight as an arrow for Garnsworthy steeple! I saw him!"

"He *flew?*"

"Of course he did, sir. He was making a machine for flying. Like a great eagle, he was, sir; or blacker, like a big rook."

"*Flew?*" cried Bernard Rodd. "Damn you, girl, he can't have! Flew? What the devil are you talking about?"

"Oh Mr. Rodd, sir!" said Mary Gilbert. "And I saw you putting the feathers on his wings with your own hands! Surely you knew he was going to fly?"

"But I never thought—Oh yes, of course, I knew he would! But it's rather stupefying—so very miraculous. That's all—it's unsettling, so completely astonishing. Well, don't stand there gaping, girl; go and get back to your work, whatever it is."

"Yes, sir," she said.

Bernard Rodd remained for a full minute, staring at a handful of feathers lying on the stone flags of the terrace. Then he had an idea, and went quickly to a privet bush on the edge of the lawn, and looked behind it; then he glanced up at the roofs, being quite unable from where he was, to see the hole in the old building; then he turned for a moment towards Garnsworthy steeple; finally, with his head down, and shambling, he walked away.

"I told Mr. Rodd, sir," said Mary Gilbert, returning to her patient.

"You impudent young baggage," said Sir Francis, "I heard what you told him!"

"Ah!" she said. "But did you hear what he told me?"

Sir Francis nodded glumly.

"It was perhaps as well," he said, "you had the mischief in you."

"No, sir," she told him. "Not mischief. As soon as I stepped on to the terrace I could see where he was looking, and I could guess what for, sir. He expected to find you with your head split open, there on the flags—if I may say so, sir."

"Aye, you may say so, girl," said Sir Francis. "Plainly it pays to let you speak your mind, or there's much I might have missed these last few minutes. But Mr. Rodd might well have expected to see me there. He saw me jump."

"He did indeed, sir. But until a man is past forty his thoughts are plain in his face for women to see; it's a special quality women

have for their own protection. And what I saw in his—by your leave—wasn't joy at not finding you blooding the pavement. 'Twas plain black anger that you'd cheated him so. And then he let slip that he wasn't quite so firm a believer in your eagle or your partridge, or whatever it was, as perhaps you might have thought, sir."

"It's always a mighty sadness," said Sir Francis, "to find friends false—but it's as well to find it out before too late. I've got that much to thank you for. Damme, Hayward's Hall shall never go to Bernard Rodd, not now. I'll see Wetherby tomorrow. And Rodd shall leave, this very night, and go back to his cotton mill, and spin spiders' webs there."

His anger rose, as the picture became clearer to him. "The fawning cur! The way he licked my boots, only for the pleasure of seeing my head split open! But this shall be a lesson to me. Hayward's Hall shall go to the Church, or it shall go to help clear the National Debt! It shall never go to him if he is nearest by blood. Good God, was ever a man cursed with such an heir as that?"

"Tchah!" said Mary Gilbert, with fierceness and contempt. "Then pity yourself for a fool!"

"What!" cried Sir Francis. "Now look here, girl, you've done me a service—but by God, if you think damned insolence—" He broke off suddenly: then said, much more mildly, "What did you mean?"

"Mean?" she said, in a fire of indignation. "Mean? You stand there crying to Heaven of the heirs you have? Did your father weep, or his father, for theirs? Are you a man, or are you just an invention of your own, about as much like a man as your pitiful eagle was like a bird? You're barely past forty, and lusty enough to jump off roofs and ride to hounds and do whatever else you have a mind to, and you weep because someone else's son doesn't behave like your own? Heirs! Why should you be even dreaming about making someone else's son your heir; why should you presume to end the Rankinsons? Tchah!" said Mary Gilbert, "I have no patience!"

"Well," said Sir Francis, "well."

And this, with the broken tile and rafter and powder of plaster and rotted wood piled on its floor, was the old Nursery.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Mary Gilbert. "I—my feelings got the better of me. I will leave in the morning, sir. I'll see Mrs. Page and tell her—"

"Well," said Sir Francis. "Well, well, well! I have *never* had such a beating!—What is your name?"

"Mary Gilbert, sir."

"Well then, Mary Gilbert," said Sir Francis, pulling up his

trouser leg and displaying a well-muscled but rather bloodied calf, " get some more bandaging, and water, and see to this."

He sat, not on one of the chairs, but on the pile of rubble heaped on the floor, holding his leg up, watching while Mary Gilbert, with an exceptional demureness after her outburst, deftly doctored the scratched limb. While he watched Sir Francis contemplatively stroked the dimple in his chin with the forefinger of his right hand. Finally the dressing was complete and the girl looked up. Her employer, finger on dimple, was regarding her intently.

" There," she said, adjusting his trouser leg.

" So you can tell what men are thinking, Mary Gilbert," said Sir Francis, " if they're under forty, by looking into their faces, can you ? A useful trick to know, and damme, I'm not so far on the wrong side of the fence. Look into mine now, Miss Gilbert, and tell me what you see. Look hard. Do you see anything ?"

" Why, no, sir."

" Nothing that reminds you, perhaps, of an expression you have sometimes interpreted on the faces of younger men ? "

" No, sir—nothing."

" Nothing at all ? "

" Your—your eyes are very bright."

They were. The glow of Sir Francis's last and longest lived Enthusiasm was being born in them.

" Ah ! " he said, " I was afraid I betrayed myself, somehow or other."

Mrs. Page the housekeeper came bursting into the room.

" Oh sir ! We've been looking for you everywhere ! Mr. Rodd said—"

" Mrs. Page," said Sir Francis, " Mr. Rodd has peculiar fancies, and you must take no notice of him. Ask Preeble to give Mr. Rodd my compliments, in that admirable tone he uses for insulting messages, and to tell Mr. Rodd that the carriage is at his disposal, and that I desire him to use it today before four o'clock, at which hour I shall be strolling round the Hall with a riding crop, to make certain there are no trespassers or evilly-disposed persons on the premises. If Preeble prefers he may write that out in his excellent copper-plate and I will sign it."

" But sir—"

" In the meantime, Mrs. Page," said Sir Francis, " I have taken a fancy to have luncheon served in the old Nursery. Lay for two ; I am entertaining a young person who has done me a very great service. Perhaps you know her. Miss Mary Gilbert—this is my chatelaine, Mrs. Page."

" Heavens above ! " cried Mrs. Page. " But sir . . ."

"Please see about it, Mrs. Page," said Sir Francis. "And leave us. We have a great deal to talk about."

And so they had. What they talked about eventually brought to pass the survival of the Rankinsons, and when the county heard what they'd talked about, as they eventually did, all the mothers who had once flung their daughters hopefully in the Rankinsons' direction said it was just the sort of thing one might have expected from a doddering eccentric like Sir Francis and look at the disparity in ages, and of course no one would receive her.

But things said in malice aren't often true, and these were false . . . because Sir Francis ceased to be eccentric, for some reason, when he married.

He produced proof that he wasn't doddering, in due course; there was no real disparity in ages, as a result of his exceptionally long boyhood; and, in the end, people had to receive such an exceptional person as Lady Mary Rankinson.

Furthermore, the light of his last Enthusiasm remained in the eyes of Sir Francis for the remainder of his long and serene life.

* * *

ANSWERS to STIRRUP CUP on page 88

1. *Abby and Martha Brewster, in "Arsenic and Old Lace," by Joseph Kesselring.*
2. *Miriam, who became the wife of Mr. Polly in H. G. Wells' novel "The History of Mr. Polly."*
3. *Mrs. Bennet, and her daughters Jane, Elizabeth, Kitty, Lydia and Mary, in "Pride and Prejudice," by Jane Austen.*
4. *The little girl in the poem "A Smuggler's Song," by Rudyard Kipling.*
5. *Katherine of France, wooed and won by Henry V of England in "King Henry the Fifth," by William Shakespeare.*
6. *Mrs. Cruncher, wife of the less admirable Jerry, in "A Tale of Two Cities," by Charles Dickens.*
7. *Lady Clare who married Lord Ronald in the poem "Lady Clare," by Alfred, Lord Tennyson.*
8. *Ellen Douglas, in the ballad "The Lady of the Lake," by Sir Walter Scott.*
9. *The Riccardi's bride in "The Statue and the Bust," by Robert Browning.*

THE RECONSTRUCTED REBEL

"When a man's as old as I," said he,
"he gets to be a terrible liar"

by

GORDON MALHERBE HILLMAN

GREAT-GRANDPA YANCEY was in a terrible temper this morning, and neither Mother nor Alabama nor even Robert Edward Lee Stratton could do anything with him.

Great-grandpa went about thumping his cane and shouting "Damnyankees!" in that high, cracked voice of his. "Rollweevils!" Great-grandpa said, "Poor white trash!" and many other matters of an uncomplimentary and sulphurous nature.

He had worn his grand-daughter out before she went to work.

"After all, Lew," she had said, "they're only a few old men. Pitifully few."

"Be a dang sight better when there's less of 'em!" Great-grandpa had stormed.

It was *The Star* that had set Great-grandpa off for there was nothing much on its front page but the encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic and the story began, "*Six Boys in Blue*—"

"Boys in blue!" Great-grandpa had snorted. "Six damn dog-robbers!"

For Great-grandpa had fought on the other side in the War Between the States; he'd been General Jeb Stuart's trumpeter.

And now mother was gone at last and Great-grandpa had stamped out onto the sun splashed front porch, Robert Edward could see General Stuart pretty clearly; the big bearded man with the sweeping yellow sash; he could even see the dust coming up in a thin cloud as the Confederate cavalry went whirling down the great Valley of Virginia.

Great-grandpa's cracked voice sounded from the porch: "Robert Edward!"

"Yessir!"

"Go get the flag!"

The flag was the Stars and Bars and Great-grandpa usually flew it only on Lee's birthday. But Robert Edward took it out of

the old mahogany chest and he and Great-grandpa had a hard struggle to fasten it to the porch railings.

" That'll show 'em," Great-grandpa said as he sank back into the padded rocking chair. " *That'll show 'em !* "

Exactly whom it would show wasn't clear, for the sycamore shaded street was empty and quiet under the bright blue Indiana sky and only a redbird or two went flickering by.

Great-grandpa tamped tobacco into his pipe. " Damnyankees ! Bunch of gold-brickers ! "

Alabama swung open the screen door. " Hesh you mouf ! "

Great-grandpa described Alabama's past, present and future with some pungency.

" You don't keep quiet," Alabama said, " you shove yo'self right into a stroke." She slammed the door and went away, very round, very black, quite indeterminate as to age.

The old flag began to sway and ripple in the southwest wind and Robert Edward sat down on the sun warmed steps, and pushed that rebellious lock of corn coloured hair out of his eyes.

Great-grandpa kept savagely rocking back and forth and he was awfully old. Sometimes he said he was a hundred and two, sometimes a hundred and five, once he had even got up to a hundred and eight. It all depended on how he felt.

The sun flared upon his face and it had gone a butternut brown ; the skin was drawn so thin it almost seemed as if the bones might break through. But the milky blue eyes were still sharp and the old man was clean shaven and neat in his dark grey suit. Great-grandpa could stand inspection any time, and so could his room and all his belongings. Only, each year, each month, each week, he seemed to shrink so his clothes would wrinkle more and more.

Robert Edward could see another thing : today Great-grandpa wasn't only old—he was lonely.

It was a pity that it should be so ; it was a pity that all over the city flags should be flying and bugles blowing and everyone doing honour to the old soldiers, yet no one doing anything at all for Trumpeter Yancey of Stuart's Cavalry, no one even remembering him. Yet wasn't he an old soldier too ?

There in the late, lazy morning, the idea came into Robert Edward's head and it was so stupendous, so audacious that it scared him nearly to death. He wasn't very brave but his mother always said that being brave was just going ahead and doing things you were frightened of.

He rose slowly to his feet and Great-grandpa looked lonelier than ever, a small, shrivelled figure in the sun.

" Got to go downtown, sir."

" Go ahead, Robert Edward."

He went upstairs and took the little box from his mother's desk drawer for he might need to show it to someone.

And then he was marching down the street beneath the sycamores; small, chubby and freckle faced, more frightened than he'd ever been in all his ten years and more determined, too.

He passed the brown house on the corner where Mr. and Mrs. Theo Hathaway lived. Alabama said that Mrs. Theo was going to have a baby, and Mr. Theo was so nervous you'd have thought he was going to have it all by himself, personally.

He turned into the wider street and he didn't dare think of what he was going to do, for, if he did, he'd never do it. He wondered if his father would have been as frightened in his place, and he couldn't remember his father very clearly because he'd been killed at Buna on the New Guinea coast a long time ago. He felt the little box in his shirt pocket, sharp and hard against his skin. No, his father wouldn't have been frightened.

It was queer not having a father as other boys did, but his mother said she and he and Great-grandpa and Alabama got on pretty well. And it was so. They got on best in the long, sultry Indiana evenings when mother sat at the shiny piano and played softly as Great-grandpa drowsed in the old black chair.

She'd play those very old songs that Great-grandpa'd heard when he'd been young:

"*It matters little now, Lorena . . .*"

or

"*It's the song, the sigh of the weary,*
Hard times, hard times, come again no more . . ."

And then much louder, almost like a cavalry band crashing out:

"*Look away! Look away!*
Dixie Land!"

And then Great-grandpa would come wide awake, his blue eyes shining.

Or perhaps she would read from the fat red volume of Mr. James Whitcomb Riley's poems.

"*There! little girl, don't cry!*
They have broken your heart, I know . . ."

And then she would begin to cry, herself, and say she couldn't help it.

Robert Edward didn't like that particular poem much, but there was a far better one farther along:

" *An' the Gobble'uns'll git you*
Ef you
Don't
Watch Out ! "

Mr. James Whitcomb Riley had lived right here in this city, and so had Mr. Booth Tarkington. Mother, who worked in a publishing house, said she did wish they were still around because they wrote a good deal better things then than the authors did now.

He went past Mr. John Kent's little white house. He liked Mr. Kent a lot. A small, dark, wiry, merry faced man, he had a great interest in really important things like flying kites and going fishing and making model airplanes.

Mr. Kent had been his father's best friend and Robert Edward guessed he was pretty fond of Mother. Alabama thought so, too, for she often said, " When a woman's got a good equationable man like Mist' Kent lookin' lovin' at her, she better latch onto him quick."

What Alabama meant by an " equationable man " Robert Edward didn't know but it *would* be nice to have Mr. Kent around all the time. But Alabama said sadly that his mother wouldn't. " She so sot an' stubborn she bound to mourn one man till she make herself into an old maid widow-woman."

Mr. Kent was around a good deal however, and he'd sit on the porch for hours and listen to Great-grandpa's slow told stories. There never were stories like those, and in the thin mid-Western twilight they somehow seemed to come alive so you could see all the places and people and things. . . . The boys of Virginia Military Institute marching out under the hard Southern sun and the bands playing *Rockabye Baby* as they went by because they were all so young. Most of them never did grow old . . . The great armies sweeping down on a sleepy little town called Gettysburg, and Pickett's men charging through the apple orchard—a thin grey line that the battle smoke blew away.

Great-grandpa Yancey had certainly seen a great deal but Robert Edward didn't think it strange. When you were with Confederate cavalry, you got around.

He was downtown now and there was Mr. James Whitcomb Riley's statue with all the pigeons sitting on it.

The streets were bright with flags and bunting, a bugle and drum corps was doing its best with *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, and here was the convention hall.

His stomach was such a hard, cold knot that he'd never dare step inside. But suddenly he *was* inside, and a big man with a gold badge was bearing down on him.

" What do you think you're doing here ? "

Robert Edward stood there with his shirt hanging outside his crumpled shorts. He said, " I want to see the old soldiers."

The big man seized him by the shoulder. " Oh you do, do you ? Well you get out of here ! "

Mr. John Kent was coming across the floor, and Robert Edward remembered hearing he was on the committee.

Mr. Kent didn't raise his voice but it was quite crisp. He said, " His father was a Congressional Medal of Honour man. Can you think of anybody who has a better right to be here ? "

The big man seemed to fade away and Mr. Kent asked, " What'll it be, Bobby ? "

" I want to speak to the old soldiers."

And then they were going straight down the centre aisle towards where all the battle flags were massed at the far end. They were so torn and faded you could hardly make out what the gold letters said: *SEVENTH REGIMENT: NEW YORK—FIRST CORPS CADETS, MASSACHUSETTS—SECOND ILLINOIS*

Beneath them in a little semicircle six old men sat in wheel chairs—six very old men. And all about them were ranged National Guardsmen and women from the auxiliary in starched white uniforms.

For a grown up Mr. Kent was quite wonderful for he didn't ask any stupid questions; he did just what you wanted him to without talking about it. He paused before the two end wheel chairs. " Sergeant George Simms, Corporal Daniel McLeod, may I present Mr. Robert Edward Lee Stratton ? "

Corporal McLeod raised a hand to his black campaign hat. " Sixth Massachusetts," he said.

Sergeant Simms said, " Twelfth Ohio and glad to see you, my boy."

Mr. Kent bent down quite close to them. " Robert Edward's father was killed at Buna in the Southwest Pacific. He holds the Congressional Medal of Honour—posthumously."

Mr. Simms turned to the nearest National Guardsman. " Go get a chair for my friend to sit down in ! Do it on the double ! "

Mr. Simms was a massive man—even now. He had a big, broad face and the slack skin hung down like dew-laps on an ancient hound. Mr. McLeod was incredibly tall and thin and fragile with a neat white goatee on his chin. Robert Edward wasn't afraid of either of them any more than he was of Great-grandpa.

He said, " I've got my father's medal. Like to look at it ? "

Mr. Simms held out his wrinkled hand and Robert Edward took the little box from his shirt pocket.

" Never did see one of them before," said Mr. McLeod.

One of the white starched ladies bent over him, " Now, Mr. McLeod, you want to be careful not to get too tired."

" You go—" Mr. McLeod snapped. " You go get me a glass of water ! "

The white starched lady flounced away and Mr. McLeod's faded brown eyes turned towards Robert Edward. " You got something on your mind, boy ? "

" Yessir. It's about my Great-grandpa Yancey. He was in the War Between the States too. He was General Jeb Stuart's trumpeter."

Mr. McLeod gave a low whistle. " A Confed ? "

The corners of Mr. Kent's mouth twitched into a twinkling smile. " An unreconstructed rebel, gentlemen."

" Well, what about him, young man ? " asked Mr. McLeod. " Is the durn old Secesh in some sort of trouble ? "

Robert Edward didn't know that he could make them see it, but he'd have to try. " Great-grandpa Yancey's awfully lonely. He's just sitting out on the porch all by himself and nobody's playing any bands or making any speeches for him. I thought—I thought—maybe if he had some soldiers to talk to—if maybe—"

Mr. McLeod turned to Mr. Simms. " George, you want to go and see an old Johnny Reb ? "

" Don't mind if I do," said Mr. Simms.

He beckoned to the National Guard lieutenant who was serving as his aide. The young lieutenant had been sorely tried already and would soon be more so.

" You ! Junior ! " snapped Mr. Simms.

" Yes, sir ? "

" Junior, you get me and Corporal McLeod out of here."

The young lieutenant looked about him in dismay and for the first time Robert Edward looked too. The hall was jammed full of people—important people, governors and mayors and generals and high dignitaries from Washington. An imposing personage with a broad black ribbon on his eyeglasses was just arising on the speakers' stand.

" But, sir— ! "

" Get moving, Junior. We've got to see an old comrade."

" But, sir ! The Senator's just about to speak . . ."

Mr. Simms said with violence, " You get me out of here before that old gas bag begins blatting ! "

There was a long, flag bedecked open car waiting outside the hall, and Mr. Kent and Junior helped the two old men in. A second National Guardsman sat at the wheel and he looked actively alarmed.

They came to the corner of the street and the Stars and Bars were still shimmering in the breeze.

" Sure is unreconstructed," said Mr. McLeod.

Robert Edward was already out of the car before he had the awful thought: Suppose Great-grandpa Yancey wouldn't want to see the old soldiers? Suppose he'd be rude?

But Mr. Kent was taking charge. He went swinging up the steps. " Mr. Yancey, here's Sergeant George Simms of the Twelfth Ohio and Corporal Daniel McLeod, Sixth Massachusetts, come to call on you."

Great-grandpa rose in immense dignity. He said, " Step aboard, Gentlemen! "

There was a movement behind the screen door and Great-grandpa roared, " You, 'Bama, three toddies! "

Alabama's voice was most indignant. " You ain't let to have no toddy this early."

Mr. Kent went swiftly through the door. " I'll fix that."

Mr. Simms let himself down into a rocking chair with a deep contented sigh. " Hear you were Jeb Stuart's trumpeter, Yancey."

To Robert Edward, sitting there on the steps, Great-grandpa's face looked quite queer. Great-grandpa said, " When a man's as old as I am, he gets to be a terrible liar. Never was anyone's trumpeter, nor in the cavalry. Fact is, I drove a team of mules."

Mr. McLeod did not seem much surprised. " There's worse things than mules," he said placidly. " They can call the infantry the Queen of Battles, but all I know is I skinned my feet from one end of the Old Dominion to the other."

There was the sound of tinkling glass and Mr. Kent came out with a tray. " Drink hearty, gentlemen! " He nodded at the two National Guardsmen still sitting moodily in their long car. " Should we give them something? "

Mr. Simms reached for a glass. " Nope. Not dry behind their ears yet."

Robert Edward sat on the steps and meditated. He was sorry to lose General J. E. B. Stuart because he'd almost become a friend of the family but, on the other hand, driving a team of mules sounded like a dashing thing to do. Robert Edward didn't realize it but he was having his first lesson in seeing his illusions fade and then making the best of what remained.

" Robert Edward! "

" Yessir? "

" Go get the other flag! " Great-grandpa said.

The other flag was the Stars and Stripes and when Robert Edward emerged with it over his arm, windows were going up all

along the street and people were running out on their porches, because three voices were raised in song, and their owners were keeping time with their canes on the floor boards.

Thump ! Thump ! Thump ! and the air was familiar but the words were not :

" All we ever do is sign the pay-roll !
All we ever do is sign the pay-roll !
All we ever do is sign the pay-roll,
And we don't get a god-damned cent ! "

" Them old rapscallions ! " said Alabama admiringly.

And then the Stars and Stripes were rippling beside the Stars and Bars, and Mr. McLeod was settling back in his chair and pulling out a corncob pipe.

" They treatin' you all right down at the encampment ? " Great-grandpa asked him.

Mr. McLeod considered. " Guess so. Get sort o' sick of sittin' around in a wheel chair and bein' wet nursed by a lot of fool women. Get sort o' sick, too, of havin' people point me out as a hero. They should 'a seen me in my first skirmish. A bunch of wild Texans came bustin' out of the brush and I threw away my rifle and ran."

He placidly lit his pipe and turned to Mr. Simms. " You ever run, George ? "

" Nope. Couldn't hardly. Had to stay with Sally Brown."

Mr. McLeod cupped his ear. " Come again ! "

Mr. Simms took a plug of tobacco from his back pocket. " I was artillery. Sally was my gun. Crankiest old field-piece you ever saw. Wouldn't be surprised if we shot up our own boys 'bout as much as we did the Rebs."

On the sun splashed steps, Mr. Kent edged a little closer to Robert Edward. He said softly, " You don't want to pay too much attention to their talk. Because, you know, they really were mostly heroes, after all."

He needn't have worried. Up to now, Robert Edward had thought of the old soldiers—even Great-grandpa—as great legendary figures in a golden mist. Now they were human beings almost like himself. They told lies ; they got scared ; they turned and ran. He liked them much better this way.

Mr. Simms stared admiringly at the sycamore shaded street ; the shadowy porch. " You live with your folks, Yancey ? "

Great-grandpa nodded. " With Robert Edward here and my grand-daughter, Mrs. Eleanor Stratton. Ellie's a right handsome woman but she ain't got any sense."

" How's that ? " asked Mr. Simms.

Great-grandpa stroked his chin. " Ellie wasn't married to Jack Stratton for more'n a few years before he got killed stopping a Jap banzai charge out at Buna. She made up her mind she won't ever get married again so she just sits around and mourns."

Even Robert Edward knew this was flagrantly untrue but Mr. Simms was saying, " Mourning won't bring a man back."

" You're durn right it won't." Great-grandpa pointed his cane at Mr. Kent. " Now there's John here, fast in love with her and ready to ask her at the drop of a hat. Good lookin', makes plenty of money, a handy man and easy to get on with. But will she have him ? No, she won't."

A strong flush came across Mr. Kent's face. " Aren't you getting a little personal, Mr. Yancey ? "

" Sure am. Mean to. I'm asking these gentlemen's advice. You'll look a long time before you find three men who've seen more life than we-all have."

That was indisputably true and Mr. McLeod's faded eyes turned towards Mr. Kent. " Why won't she have you, son ? "

Mr. Kent said, " Well, that's a little complicated . . ."

" No 't'isn't," said Great-grandpa. " She thinks the world stopped dead because Jack got killed. The durn thing didn't. What's goin' to become of her, I should like to know, when I'm not around to look after her ? "

Robert Edward was a little surprised because he hadn't known that Great-grandpa looked after anyone.

There was the sound of running steps and Mr. Theo Hathaway came charging up the walk, his hair every which way, his glasses hanging half off, his collar undone.

Mr. Hathaway's eyes were wild and he said in a gasp, " Use your phone—Our's out of order—Call a taxi—Baby's coming any second—Got to get Lois to hospital."

Mr. Simms must have been a good sergeant for he came to his feet immediately. " Don't waste time, young fella. We got a Guard car right here that's got a siren on it and don't stop for nothing."

He went to the railing. " You, Junior ! "

" Yes, sir ? "

" Pull your socks up. You got to get a woman to the hospital before she has a baby."

Junior showed strong symptoms of fright. " Can't possibly do it, sir. My strict orders are to stay with you."

Great-grandpa Yancey rose, and majestically moved to the top of the steps. He addressed Junior and his remarks were pungent, profane and to the point. They had artistry and authority and bite.

Junior's mouth flew wide open. " Yes, *sir !* " he said.

Mr. Kent said, " Maybe I'd better go, too." He ran down the steps, snatched the prospective father onto the running board, and the car began to move towards the Hathaway house.

" That was pretty lucid cussin', Yancey," said Mr. Simms.

Great-grandpa sat down again and looked hopefully into his empty glass. " Mules don't feel no way comfortable unless they're bein' cussed." The siren's wail still was sounding a long way off and he said, " Reckon it'll be a mite rough on Junior if they don't make it in time."

Then Robert Edward's mother came hurrying down the block. She *was* a handsome woman, thought Robert Edward. Her soft hair was blowing in the wind, and she looked like a Virginian lady with the colour coming and going in those creamy cheeks of hers.

She came up the steps in a rush and her voice was soft and Southern, too. " There was a military car just went racing by, its siren going like mad, and I saw Lois Hathaway in the back seat . . ." She stopped suddenly for she hadn't expected to find the Grand Army of the Republic sitting on her porch.

Great-grandpa kept on rocking. " Lois cut it a leetle too fine, so that dumb husband of hers and John Kent and two National Guard fellas got her off to the hospital in a hurry. Ellie, this is Sergeant George Simms, Twelfth Ohio, and Corporal Dan McLeod, Sixth Massachusetts. They come to keep me company."

His mother's eyes sparkled. " Why, how very nice ! "

Mr. McLeod gave a gallant sweep of his hat and rose to his feet. " Comrade Yancey was just telling us about you, Ma'am. He didn't exaggerate either. Don't know when I've seen a lady half as handsome." He turned to Robert Edward. " Bring up a chair for your Ma, young man ! "

Mr. Simms surveyed her sternly. He said, " Young woman, you ought to have a father for that boy of yours. Look at him ! Runnin' around with his shirt tail stickin' out of his pants. Puttin' his nose in where it hadn't no business to be and bustin' up the whole encampment of the G. A. R. And all because he hasn't any proper Pa to see to him ! "

Robert Edward was so amazed he forgot to be aggrieved when his mother said, " Why, Bobby ! What *have* you been doing ? "

Mr. McLeod's eye closed in a slow, solemn wink. " Don't worry, Ma'am. The boy's been doin' all right."

Mr. Simms became still more severe, " Young woman, if I was you, I'd quit shilly-shallyin' around and marry that John Kent fella about's quick's I could."

Her eyebrows went up, and she turned on Great-grandpa. " Lewis Culpepper Yancey . . ."

Great-grandpa snapped, " High time you got a good talkin' to. Expect me to stick around and look after you all your life, do you ? Well, I ain't likely to. It's agin nature."

Mr. Simms began banging his cane on the floor. " The Old Reb's right. You . . ."

" Shut up, George," said Mr. McLeod. He made a little bow— " You'll have to excuse us old soldiers, Ma'am. We haven't too much time so we sort of have to talk straight. And maybe our manners aren't any too good."

Mother said, " You have beautiful manners, Mr. McLeod."

Mr. McLeod bowed again and he seemed more silvery and fragile than ever. " Thank you, Ma'am. And you won't mind if we speak to you, Ma'am, because we're just passing by and we aren't likely to come this way again."

He sat up very straight as if he were making an enormous effort.

" The thing Yancey and George've been trying to tell you's just this. When someone you love dies, it's a dreadful thing. It's so dreadful it seems all life's come to a dead stop. But it don't. It just changes and you've got to change with it or you dry all up inside." He looked at the late afternoon light flickering through the tall sycamores. " I ought to know."

And mother said very softly, " I see what you mean Mr. McLeod."

The old man couldn't sit straight any more. He began to slump. " Now George and I've seen considerable of this Mr. John Kent. He's about the only person hasn't treated us old soldiers as if we were pieces out of some museum. And he's just as nice to your boy here. I wish you'd look kindly on Mr. Kent, Ma'am."

" A-men ! " said Alabama from inside the screen door.

Mother just sat there and Robert Edward couldn't tell what she was thinking, and the soft colour kept coming and going in her face, rose to cream and rose again.

She was thinking of the three old men here on the porch. They were so very old you could almost see the life ebbing out of them, and not so very far away in a hospital room, another life—a very new life—was at its start. No, things didn't stop. Mr. McLeod was right about that. They simply took a different shape.

You might be badly hurt, but the great tide of life went sweeping on, now bright, now dark, but never still. It ever changed and so you must change, too. She looked at Robert Edward and he did deserve a father, a real one, not some shadowy gallant ghost.

She said, " I'll think about it carefully, Mr. McLeod."

She jumped up and ran down the steps because the long National Guard car had just slid to a stop again at the curb.

" What happened, John ? "

Mr. Kent climbed out, quite calm, quite unruffled. " We made it with about four minutes to spare. It's a boy and Lois is doing very well. Theo isn't but will undoubtedly revive." He nodded at Junior. " We had quite a ride, didn't we, Lieutenant ? "

Junior's trials had been too much for him. He said in a sudden burst, " Feeble old men, they told me ! Frail old men, they told me ! Treat them carefully and don't let them get tired." His face had a harried, almost hunted look. " All day long, they've run me ragged ! "

Eleanor put her hand through Mr. Kent's arm. She said, " John, the Grand Army of the Republic has just been giving me a good talking to."

Mr. Kent's face lost its merry look and held a worried one instead. " I hope you didn't pay any attention to them."

Her lips quivered ever so slightly. " I paid the most particular attention, John. I'm not at all sure but what they may be right."

Robert Edward watched them come up the steps and they both did seem a little different. But he couldn't be certain . . .

Mother spread out her hands. She said, " They got there in time and Lois has a beautiful baby boy." And she surely had a new look about her—almost as if something were shining inside.

Great-grandpa said hopefully, " Wouldn't that seem to call for a little celebration, Ellie ? "

And mother leaned down and kissed him. " It most certainly would, and I'll go in and get it. John, you come along and help."

The screen door closed and Robert Edward sat hoping the celebration would run to something to eat for he'd had no lunch.

A redbird came to sit in the nearest sycamore tree and the Stars and Stripes and the Stars and Bars swayed and rippled side by side as the three old men dozed on the shaded porch and the summer sun went down.

* * *

BORED

" It's a mighty good book," said a publisher, speaking of one of his own publications, to Upton Sinclair. " Have you read it ? What do you think of it ? "

" There is at least one thing to be said in its favour," admitted Mr. Sinclair. " A friend of mine carried it through the Spanish American war in his breast pocket, and a ball ricochetted against his ribs, but the book saved him. That ball was unable to get beyond the fourth chapter."

IF LOVE BE LOVE

I AM dark and fair to see,
Young in my virginity,
Rose my colour is and white,
Pretty mouth and green my eyes;
And my breast it pricks me so
I may not endure it,
For I meddle me to know
Love, and naught can cure it.

Author unknown

PUT your head, darling, darling, darling,
Your darling black head my heart above,
Oh, mouth of honey with thyme for fragrance,
Who, with heart in breast, could deny you love?

Oh, many and many a young girl for me is pining,
Letting her locks of gold to the cold wind free,
For me, the foremost of our gay young fellows;
But I'd leave a hundred, pure love, for thee!

Then put your head, darling, darling, darling,
Your darling black head my heart above;
Oh, mouth of honey with thyme for fragrance,
Who, with heart in breast, could deny you love?

SAMUEL FERGUSON, 1810-1886

THE hunchèd camels of the night
Trouble the bright
And silver waters of the moon.
The maiden of the Morn will soon
Through Heaven stray and sing,
Star gathering.

Now while the dark about our loves is strewn,
Love of my dark, blood of my heart, Oh come!
And night will catch her breath up, and be dumb.

Leave thy father, leave thy mother
And thy brother;
Leave the black tents of thy tribe apart
Am I not thy father and thy brother,
And thy mother?
And thou—what needest with thy tribe's black tents
Who hast the red pavilion of my heart?

FRANCIS THOMPSON, 1859-1907

'HARP and carp, Thomas,' she said.
'Harp and carp along wi' me;
And if ye dare to kiss my lips,
Sure of your bodie I will be.'

'Betide me weal, betide me woe,
That wierd shall never daunten me.'
Syne he has kissed her rosy lips,
All underneath the Eildon Tree.

Author unknown

★ *It was a happy chance that diverted Hercule Poirot from retirement—the discovery of the Classics and of his own namesake, the hero Hercules, in particular.*

But after thirty years of sleuthing M. Poirot was quick to recognize the type. This was no hero by modern standards, this muscular brute of low intelligence and, indeed, criminal tendencies.

Then a new idea crept into his mind. The world should not be cheated of its Hercules, nor lose the benefit of his Labours. He, Hercule Poirot, would undertake the task in his own way. Twelve great cases—among them—

THE CASE OF THE CRETAN BULL

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

HERCULE POIROT looked thoughtfully at his visitor.

He saw a pale face with a determined looking chin, eyes that were more grey than blue, and hair that was of that real blue-black shade so seldom seen—the hyacinthine locks of ancient Greece.

He noted the well cut, but also well worn, country tweeds, the shabby handbag, and the unconscious arrogance of manner that lay behind the girl's obvious nervousness.

He thought to himself: Ah yes, she is " the County "—but no money! And it must be something quite out of the way that would bring her to me.

Diana Maberly said, and her voice shook a little, " I—I don't know whether you can help me or not, M. Poirot. It's—it's a very extraordinary position."

Poirot said, " But yes? Tell me? "

Diana Maberly said, " I've come to you because I don't know *what* to do! I don't even know if there *is* anything to do! "

" Will you let me be the judge of that? "

The colour surged suddenly into the girl's face. She said rapidly and breathlessly, " I've come to you because the man I've been engaged to for over a year has broken off our engagement."

She stopped and eyed him defiantly.

" You must think," she said, " that I'm completely mental."

Slowly, Hercule Poirot shook his head.

" On the contrary, Mademoiselle, I have no doubt whatever

but that you are extremely intelligent. It is certainly not my *métier* in life to patch up the lovers' quarrels, and I know very well that you are quite aware of that. It is, therefore, that there is something unusual about the breaking of this engagement. That is so, is it not ? "

The girl nodded. She said in a clear, precise voice, " Hugh broke off our engagement because he thinks he is going mad. He thinks people who are mad should not marry."

Hercule Poirot's eyebrows rose a little.

" And do you not agree ? "

" I don't know . . . What *is* being mad, after all ? Everyone is a little mad."

" It has been said so," Poirot agreed cautiously.

" It's only when you begin thinking you're a poached egg or something that they have to shut you up."

" And your fiancé has not reached that stage ? "

Diana Maberly said, " I can't see that there's anything wrong with Hugh at all. He's, oh, he's the sanest person I know. Sound—dependable—"

" Then why does he think he is going mad ? "

Poirot paused a moment before going on.

" Is there, perhaps, madness in his family ? "

Reluctantly Diana jerked her head in assent. She said, " His grandfather was mental, I believe—and some great-aunt or other. But what I say is, *every* family has got someone queer in it. You know, a bit half witted or extra clever or *something* ! "

Her eyes were appealing.

Hercule Poirot shook his head sadly. He said, " I am very sorry for you, Mademoiselle."

Her chin shot out. She cried, " I don't want you to be sorry for me ! I want you to *do* something ! "

" What do you want me to do ? "

" I don't know—*but there's something wrong.*"

" Will you tell me, Mademoiselle, all about your fiancé ? "

Diana spoke rapidly. " His name's Hugh Chandler. He's twenty four. His father is Admiral Chandler. They live at Lyde Manor. It's been in the Chandler family since the time of Elizabeth. Hugh's the only son. He went into the Navy—all the Chandlers are sailors—it's a sort of tradition—ever since Sir Gilbert Chandler sailed with Sir Walter Raleigh in fifteen-something-or-other. Hugh went into the Navy as a matter of course. His father wouldn't have heard of anything else. And yet—and yet, it was his *father* who insisted on getting him out of it ! "

" When was that ? "

" Nearly a year ago. Quite suddenly."

" Was Hugh Chandler happy in his profession ? "

" Absolutely."

" There was no scandal of any kind ? "

" About Hugh ? Absolutely nothing. He was getting on splendidly. He—he couldn't understand his father."

" What reason did Admiral Chandler himself give ? "

Diana said slowly, " He never really gave a reason. Oh ! he said it was necessary Hugh should learn to manage the estate—but—but that was only a pretext. Even George Frobisher realized that."

" Who is George Frobisher ? "

" Colonel Frobisher. He's Admiral Chandler's oldest friend and Hugh's godfather. He spends most of his time down at the Manor."

" And what did Colonel Frobisher think of Admiral Chandler's determination that his son should leave the Navy ? "

" He was dumbfounded. He couldn't understand it at all. Nobody could."

" Not even Hugh Chandler himself ? "

Diana did not answer at once.

Poirot waited a minute, then he went on, " At the time, perhaps, he, too, was astonished. But now ? Has he said nothing—nothing at all ? "

Diana murmured reluctantly, " He said—about a week ago—that—that his father was right—that it was the only thing to be done."

" Did you ask him why ? "

" Of course. But he wouldn't tell me."

Hercule Poirot reflected for a minute or two. Then he said, " Have there been any unusual occurrences in your part of the world ? Starting, perhaps, about a year ago ? Something that has given rise to a lot of local talk and surmise ? "

She flashed out, " I don't know what you mean ! "

Poirot said quietly, but with authority in his voice, " You had better tell me."

" There wasn't anything—nothing of the kind you mean."

" Of what kind then ? "

" I think you're simply odious ! Queer things often happen on farms. It's revenge—or the village idiot or somebody."

" *What happened ?* "

She said reluctantly, " There was a fuss about some sheep . . . Their throats were cut. Oh ! it was horrid ! But they all belonged to one farmer and he's a very hard man. The police thought it was some kind of spite against him."

" But they didn't catch the person who had done it ? "

" No."

She added fiercely, " But if you think—"

Poirot held up his hand. He said, " You do not know in the least what I think. Tell me this, has your fiancé consulted a doctor ? "

" No, I'm sure he hasn't."

" Wouldn't that be the simplest thing for him to do ? "

Diana said slowly, " He won't. He—he hates doctors."

" And his father ? "

" I don't think the Admiral believes much in doctors either. Says they're a lot of humbug merchants."

" How does the Admiral seem himself ? Is he well ? Happy ? "

Diana said in a low voice, " He's aged terribly in—in—"

" In the last year ? "

" Yes. He's a wreck—a sort of shadow of what he used to be."

Poirot nodded thoughtfully. Then he said, " Did he approve of his son's engagement ? "

" Oh yes. You see, my people's land adjoins his. We've been there for generations. He was frightfully pleased when Hugh and I fixed it up."

" And now ? What does he say to your engagement being broken off ? "

The girl's voice shook a little. She said, " I met him yesterday morning. He was looking ghastly. He took my hand in both of his. He said, ' It's hard on you, my girl. But the boy's doing the right thing—the only thing he can do.' "

" And so," said Hercule Poirot, " you came to me ? "

She nodded. She asked, " Can you do anything ? "

Hercule Poirot replied, " I do not know. But I can at least come down and see for myself."

It was Hugh Chandler's magnificent physique that impressed Hercule Poirot more than anything else. Tall, magnificently proportioned, with a terrific chest and shoulders, and a tawny head of hair. There was a tremendous air of strength and virility about him.

On their arrival at Diana's house, she had at once rung up Admiral Chandler, and they had forthwith gone over to Lyde Manor where they had found tea waiting on the long terrace. And with the tea, three men.

There was Admiral Chandler, white haired, looking older than his years, his shoulders bowed as though by an over-heavy burden, and his eyes dark and brooding. A contrast to him was his friend Colonel Frobisher, a dried-up, tough, little man with reddish hair turning grey at the temples. A restless, irascible, snappy, little man, rather like a terrier—but the possessor of a pair of extremely

shrewd eyes. He had a habit of drawing down his brows over his eyes and lowering his head, thrusting it forward, whilst those same shrewd little eyes studied you piercingly. The third man was Hugh.

" Fine specimen, eh ? " said Colonel Frobisher.

He spoke in a low voice, having noted Poirot's close scrutiny of the young man.

Hercule Poirot nodded his head. He and Frobisher were sitting close together. The other three had their chairs on the far side of the tea table and were chatting together in an animated but slightly artificial manner.

Poirot murmured, " Yes, he is magnificent—magnificent. He is the young Bull—yes, one might say the Bull dedicated to Poseidon . . . A perfect specimen of healthy manhood."

" Looks fit enough, doesn't he ? "

Frobisher sighed. His shrewd little eyes stole sideways, considering Hercule Poirot. Then he said, " I know who you are, you know."

" Ah that, it is no secret ! "

Poirot waved a royal hand. He was not incognito, the gesture seemed to say. He was travelling as Himself.

After a minute or two Frobisher asked, " Did the girl get you down—over this business ? "

" The business—? "

" The business of young Hugh . . . Yes, I see you know all about it. But I can't quite see why she went to *you* . . . Shouldn't have thought this sort of thing was in your line—meantersay it's more a medical show."

" All kinds of things are in my line . . . You would be surprised."

" I mean I can't see quite what she expected you could *do*."

" Miss Maberly," said Poirot, " is a fighter."

Colonel Frobisher nodded a warm assent.

" Yes, she's a fighter all right. She's a fine girl. She won't give up. All the same, you know, there are some things that you *can't* fight . . ."

His face looked suddenly old and tired.

Poirot dropped his voice still lower. He murmured discreetly, " There is—insanity, I understand, in the family ? "

Frobisher nodded.

" Only crops up now and again," he murmured. " Skips a generation or two. Hugh's grandfather was the last."

Poirot threw a quick glance in the direction of the other three. Diana was holding the conversation well, laughing and bantering Hugh. You would have said that the three of them had not a care in the world.

" What form did the madness take ? " Poirot asked softly.

"The old boy became pretty violent in the end. He was perfectly all right up to thirty—normal as could be. Then he began to go a bit queer. It was some time before people noticed it. Then a lot of rumours began going around. Things happened that were hushed up. But—well, he ended up as mad as a hatter, poor devil! Homicidal! Had to be certified."

He paused for a moment and then added, "He lived to be quite an old man, I believe . . . That's what Hugh is afraid of, of course. That's why he doesn't want to see a doctor. He's afraid of being shut up and living shut up for years. Can't say I blame him. I'd feel the same."

"And Admiral Chandler, how does he feel?"

"It's broken him up completely." Frobisher spoke shortly.

"He is very fond of his son?"

"Wrapped up in the boy. You see, his wife was drowned in a boating accident when the boy was only ten years old. Since then he's lived for nothing but the child."

"Was he very devoted to his wife?"

"Worshipped her. Everybody worshipped her. She was—she was one of the loveliest women I've ever known." He paused a moment and then said jerkily, "Care to see her portrait?"

"I should like to see it very much."

Frobisher pushed back his chair and rose.

Aloud he said, "Going to show M. Poirot one or two things, Charles. He's a bit of a connoisseur."

The Admiral raised a vague hand. Frobisher tramped along the terrace and Poirot followed him. For a moment Diana's face dropped its mask of gaiety and looked an agonized question. Hugh, too, raised his head, and looked steadily at the small man with the big black moustache.

Poirot followed Frobisher into the house. It was so dim at first coming in out of the sunlight that he could hardly distinguish one article from another. But he realized that the house was full of old and beautiful things.

Colonel Frobisher led the way to the Picture Gallery. On the panelled walls hung portraits of dead and gone Chandlers. Faces stern and gay, men in court dress or in naval uniform. Women in satin and pearls.

Finally Frobisher stopped under a portrait at the end of the gallery.

"Painted by Orpen," he said gruffly.

They stood looking up at a tall woman, her hand on a greyhound's collar. A woman with auburn hair and an expression of radiant vitality.

"Boy's the spitting image of her," said Frobisher. "Don't you think so?"

"In some things, yes."

"He hasn't got her delicacy—her femininity, of course. He's a masculine edition—but in all the essential things—" He broke off. "Pity he inherited from the Chandlers the one thing he could well have done without . . ."

They were silent. There was melancholy in the air all round them—as though dead and gone Chandlers sighed for the taint that lay in their blood and which, remorselessly, from time to time, they passed on . . .

Hercule Poirot turned his head to look at his companion. George Frobisher was still gazing up at the beautiful woman on the wall above him.

Poirot said softly, "You knew her well . . ."

Frobisher spoke jerkily.

"We were boy and girl together. I went off as a subaltern to India when she was sixteen . . . When I got back—she was married to Charles Chandler."

"You knew him well also?"

"Charles is one of my oldest friends. He's my best friend—always has been."

"Did you see much of them—after the marriage?"

"Used to spend most of my leaves here. Like a second home to me, this place. Charles and Caroline always kept my room here—ready and waiting . . ." He squared his shoulders, and suddenly thrust his head forward pugnaciously. "That's why I'm here now—to stand by in case I'm wanted."

Again the shadow of tragedy crept over them.

"And what do you think—about all this?" Poirot asked.

Frobisher stood stiffly. His brows came down over his eyes.

"What I think is, the least said the better. And to be frank, I don't see what you're doing in the business, M. Poirot. I don't see why Diana roped you in and got you down here."

"You are aware that Diana Maberly's engagement to Hugh Chandler has been broken off?"

"Yes, I know that."

"And you know the reason for it?"

Frobisher replied stiffly, "I don't know anything about that. Young people manage these things between them. Not my business."

Poirot said, "Hugh Chandler told Diana that it was not right that they should marry, because he was going out of his mind."

He saw the beads of perspiration break out on Frobisher's forehead. He said, "Have we got to talk about the damned thing? What do you think *you* can do? Hugh's done the right thing, poor

devil. It's not his fault, it's heredity—germ plasm—brain cells . . . But once he *knew*, well, what else *could* he do but break the engagement ? It's one of those things that just has to be done."

" If I could be convinced of that—"

" You can take it from me."

" But you have told me nothing."

" I tell you I don't want to talk about it."

" Why did Admiral Chandler force his son to leave the Navy ? "

" Because it was the only thing to be done."

" Why ? "

Frobisher shook an obstinate head.

Poirot murmured softly, " Was it to do with some sheep being killed ? "

The other man said angrily, " So you've heard about that ? "

" Diana told me."

" That girl had far better keep her mouth shut."

" She did not think it was conclusive."

" She doesn't know."

" What doesn't she know ? "

Unwillingly, jerkily, angrily, Frobisher spoke, " Oh well, if you must have it . . . Chandler heard a noise that night. Thought it might be someone got in the house. Went out to investigate. Light in the boy's room. Chandler went in. Hugh asleep on bed—dead asleep—in his clothes. Blood on the clothes. Basin in the room full of blood. His father couldn't wake him.

" Next morning heard about sheep being found with their throats cut. Questioned Hugh. Boy didn't know anything about it. Didn't remember going out—and his shoes found by the side door caked in mud. Couldn't explain the blood in the basin. Couldn't explain anything. Poor devil didn't *know*, you understand.

" Charles came to me, talked it over. What was the best thing to be done ? Then it happened again—three nights later. After that—well, you can see for yourself. The boy had got to leave the service. If he was here, under Charles' eye, Charles could watch over him. Couldn't afford to have a scandal in the Navy. Yes, it was the only thing to be done."

Poirot asked, " And since then ? "

Frobisher said fiercely, " I'm not answering any more questions. Don't you think Hugh knows his own business best ? "

Hercule Poirot did not answer. He was always loath to admit that anyone could know better than Hercule Poirot.

As they came into the hall, they met Admiral Chandler coming in. He stood for a moment, a dark figure silhouetted against the bright light outside.

He said in a low, gruff voice, " Oh there you both are. M.

Poirot, I would like a word with you. Come into my study."

Frobisher went out through the open door, and Poirot followed the Admiral. He had rather the feeling of having been summoned to the quarterdeck to give an account of himself.

The Admiral motioned Poirot to take one of the big easy chairs and himself sat down in the other. Poirot, whilst with Frobisher, had been impressed by the other's restlessness, nervousness and irritability—all the signs of intense mental strain. With Admiral Chandler he felt a sense of quiet, deep despair . . .

With a deep sigh, Chandler said, "I can't help being sorry Diana has brought you into this . . . Poor child, I know how hard it is for her. But—well—it is our own private tragedy, and I think you will understand, M. Poirot, that we don't want outsiders."

"I can understand your feeling, certainly."

"Diana, poor child, can't believe it . . . *I* couldn't at first. Probably wouldn't believe it now if I didn't know—"

He paused.

"Know what?"

"That it's in the blood. The taint, I mean."

"And yet you agreed to the engagement?"

Admiral Chandler reddened.

"You mean, I should have put my foot down then? But at the time I'd no idea. Hugh takes after his mother—nothing about him to remind you of the Chandlers. I hoped he'd taken after her in every way. From his childhood upwards, there's never been a trace of abnormality about him until now. I couldn't know that—dash it all, there's a trace of insanity in nearly every old family!"

Poirot said softly, "You have not consulted a doctor?"

Chandler roared, "No, and I'm not going to! The boy's safe enough here with me to look after him. They shan't shut him up between four walls like a wild beast . . ."

"He is safe here, you say. But are *others* safe?"

"What do you mean by that?"

Poirot did not reply. He looked steadily into Admiral Chandler's sad, dark eyes.

The Admiral said bitterly, "Each man to his trade. You're looking for a criminal! My boy's *not* a criminal, M. Poirot."

"Not yet."

"What do you mean by 'not yet'?"

"These things increase . . . Those sheep—"

"Who told you about the sheep?"

"Diana Maberly. And also your friend Colonel Frobisher."

" George would have done better to keep his mouth shut."

" He is a very old friend of yours, is he not ? "

" My best friend," the Admiral said gruffly.

" And he was a friend of—your wife's, too ? "

Chandler smiled.

" Yes. George was in love with Caroline, I believe. When she was very young. He's never married. I believe that's the reason. Ah well, I was the lucky one—or so I thought. I carried her off—only to lose her."

He sighed and his shoulders sagged.

Poirot said, " Colonel Frobisher was with you when your wife was—drowned ? "

Chandler nodded.

" Yes, he was with us down in Cornwall when it happened. She and I were out in the boat together—he happened to stay at home that day. I've never understood how that boat came to capsize . . . Must have sprung a sudden leak. We were right out in the bay—strong tide running. I held her up as long as I could but . . ."

His voice broke. " Her body was washed up two days later. Thank Heavens we hadn't taken little Hugh out with us ! At least, that's what I thought at the time. Now—well—better for Hugh, poor devil, perhaps, if he *had* been with us. If it had all been finished and done with then . . ."

Again there came that deep, hopeless sigh.

" We're the last of the Chandlers, M. Poirot. There will be no more Chandlers at Lyde after *we're* gone. When Hugh got engaged to Diana, I hoped—well, it's no good talking of that. Thank heavens, they didn't marry. That's all I can say ! "

Hercule Poirot sat on a seat in the rose garden. Beside him sat Hugh Chandler. Diana Maberly had just left them.

The young man turned a handsome, tortured face towards his companion.

He said, " You've got to make her understand, M. Poirot."

He paused for a minute and then went on, " You see, Di's a fighter. She won't give in. She won't accept what she's darned well got to accept. She—she *will* go on believing that I'm—sane."

" While you yourself are quite certain that you are—pardon me—insane ? "

The young man winced. He said, " I'm not actually hopelessly off my head yet—but it's getting worse. Diana doesn't know, bless her. She's only seen me when I am—all right."

" And when you are—all wrong, what happens ? "

Hugh Chandler took a long breath. Then he said, " For one

thing—I *dream*. And when I dream, I *am* mad. Last night, for instance—I wasn't a man any longer. I was first of all a bull—a mad bull—racing about in blazing sunlight—tasting dust and blood in my mouth—dust and blood. . .

" And then I was a dog—a great slavering dog. I had hydrophobia—children scattered and fled as I came—men tried to shoot me—someone set down a great bowl of water for me and I couldn't drink. *I couldn't drink* . . ."

He paused. " I woke up. *And I knew it was true.* I went over to the washstand. My mouth was parched—horribly parched—and dry. I was thirsty. But I couldn't drink, M. Poirot . . . I couldn't swallow . . . Oh, my God, *I wasn't able to drink* . . ."

Hercule Poirot made a gentle murmur. Hugh Chandler went on. His hands were clenched on his knees. His face was thrust forward, his eyes were half closed as though he saw something coming towards him.

" And there are things that aren't dreams. Things that I see when I'm wide awake. Spectres, frightful shapes. They leer at me. And sometimes I'm able to fly, to leave my bed, and fly through the air, to ride the winds—and fiends bear me company ! "

" Tcha, tcha," said Hercule Poirot.

It was a gentle, deprecating little noise.

Hugh Chandler turned to him.

" Oh, there isn't any doubt. It's in my blood. It's my family heritage. I can't escape. Thank God I found it out in time! Before I'd married Diana. Suppose we'd had a child and handed on this frightful thing to him ! "

He laid a hand on Poirot's arm.

" *You must make her understand.* You must tell her. She's got to forget. She's *got* to. There will be someone else someday. There's young Steve Graham—he's crazy about her and he's an awfully good chap. She'd be happy with him—and safe. I want her—to be happy. Graham's hard up, of course, and so are her people, but when I'm gone they'll be all right."

Hercule's voice interrupted him.

" Why will they be ' all right ' when you are gone ? "

Hugh Chandler smiled. It was a gentle, lovable smile. He said, " There's my mother's money. She was an heiress, you know. It came to me. I've left it all to Diana."

Hercule Poirot sat back in his chair. He said, " Ah ! " Then he said, " But you may live to be quite an old man, Mr. Chandler."

Hugh Chandler shook his head. He said sharply, " No, M. Poirot. I am not going to live to be an old man."

Then he drew back with a sudden shudder.

" My God ! Look ! " He stared over Poirot's shoulder. " *There*

—standing by you . . . it's a skeleton—it's bones are shaking. It's calling to me—beckoning—"

His eyes, the pupils widely dilated, stared into the sunshine. He leaned suddenly sideways as though collapsing.

Then turning to Poirot, he said in an almost childlike voice. "You didn't see—*anything*?"

Slowly, Hercule Poirot shook his head.

Hugh Chandler said hoarsely, "I don't mind this so much—seeing things. *It's the blood I'm frightened of.* The blood in my room—on my clothes . . . We had a parrot. *One morning it was there in my room with its throat cut*—and I was lying on the bed with the razor in my hand wet with its blood!"

He leant closer to Poirot.

"Even just lately things have been killed," he whispered. "All round—in the village—out on the downs. Sheep, young lambs—a collie dog. Father locks me in at night, but sometimes—sometimes—the door's open in the morning. I must have a key hidden somewhere but I don't know where I've hidden it. *I don't know.* It isn't *I* who do these things—it's someone else who comes into me—who takes possession of me—who turns me from a man into a raving monster who wants blood and who can't drink water and who . . ."

Suddenly he buried his face in his hands.

After a minute or two, Poirot asked, "I still do not understand why you have not seen a doctor?"

Hugh Chandler shook his head. He said, "Don't you really understand? Physically I'm strong. I'm as strong as a bull. I might live for years—years—shut up between four walls! That I can't face! It would be better to go out altogether . . . There are ways, you know. An accident, cleaning a gun . . . that sort of thing. Diana will understand . . . I'd rather take my own way out!"

He looked defiantly at Poirot, but Poirot did not respond to the challenge. Instead he asked mildly, "What do you eat and drink?"

Hugh Chandler flung his head back. He roared with laughter.

"Nightmares after indigestion? Is that your idea?"

Poirot merely repeated gently, "What do you eat and drink?"

"Just what everybody else eats and drinks."

"No special medicine? Cachets? Pills?"

"Good heavens, no. Do you really think patent pills would cure my trouble?" He quoted derisively, "*Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased?*"

Hercule Poirot said dryly, "I am trying to. Does anyone in this house suffer with eye trouble?"

Hugh Chandler stared at him. He said, "Father's eyes give

him a good deal of trouble. He has to go to an oculist fairly often."

"Ah!" Poirot meditated for a moment or two. Then he said, "Colonel Frobisher, I suppose, has lived in India?"

"Yes, he was in the Indian Army. He's very keen on India—talks about it a lot—native traditions—and all that."

Poirot murmured "Ah!" again.

Then he remarked, "I see that you have cut your chin."

Hugh put his hand up.

"Yes, quite a nasty gash. Father startled me one day when I was shaving. I'm a bit nervy these days, you know. And I've had a bit of a rash over my chin and neck. Makes shaving difficult."

Poirot said, "You should use a soothing cream."

"Oh, I do. Uncle George gave me one."

He gave a sudden laugh.

"We're talking like a woman's beauty parlour. Lotions, soothing creams, patent pills, eye trouble. What does it all amount to? What are you getting at, M. Poirot?"

Poirot said quietly, "I am trying to do the best I can for Diana."

Hugh's mood changed. His face sobered. He laid a hand on Poirot's arm.

"Yes, do what you can for her. Tell her she's got to forget. Tell her that it's no good hoping . . . Tell her some of the things I've told you . . . Tell her—oh, tell her for God's sake to keep away from me! That's the only thing she can do for me now. Keep away—and try to forget!"

"Have you courage, Mademoiselle? Great courage? You will need it."

Diana cried sharply, "Then it's true. It's true? He *is* mad?"

Hercule Poirot said, "I am not an alienist, Mademoiselle. It is not I who can say, 'This man is mad. This man is sane.'"

She came closer to him.

"Admiral Chandler thinks Hugh is mad. George Frobisher thinks he is mad. Hugh himself thinks he is mad—"

Poirot was watching her.

"And you, Mademoiselle?"

"I? *I say he isn't mad!* That's why—" She stopped.

"That is why you came to me?"

"Yes. I couldn't have had any other reason for coming to you, could I?"

"That," said Hercule Poirot, "is exactly what I have been asking myself, Mademoiselle!"

"I don't understand you."

"Who is Stephen Graham?"

She stared. "Stephen Graham? Oh, he's—he's just someone."

She caught Poirot by the arm.

" What's in your mind ? What are you thinking about ? You just stand there—behind that great moustache of yours—blinking your eyes in the sunlight, and you don't tell me anything. You're making me afraid—horribly afraid. *Why* are you making me afraid ? "

" Perhaps," said Poirot, " because I am afraid myself."

The deep grey eyes opened wide, stared up at him. She said in a whisper, " What are you afraid of ? "

Hercule Poirot sighed—a deep sigh. He said, " It is much easier to catch a murderer than it is to prevent a murder."

She cried out, " Murder ? Don't use that word."

" Nevertheless," said Hercule Poirot, " I do use it."

He altered his tone, speaking quickly and authoritatively.

" Mademoiselle, it is necessary that both you and I should pass the night at Lyde Manor. Can you arrange that ? "

" I—yes—I suppose so. But why—? "

" *Because there is no time to lose.* You have told me that you have courage. Prove that courage now. Do what I ask and make no questions about it."

She nodded without a word and turned away.

Poirot followed her into the house after the lapse of a moment or two. He heard her voice in the library and the voices of three men. He passed up the broad staircase. There was no one on the upper landing.

He found Hugh Chandler's room easily enough. In the corner of the room was a fitted washbasin with hot and cold water. Over it, on a glass shelf, were various tubes and pots and bottles.

Hercule Poirot went quickly and dexterously to work . . .

What he had to do did not take him long. He was downstairs again in the hall when Diana came out of the library, looking flushed and rebellious.

" It's all right," she said.

Admiral Chandler drew Poirot into the library and closed the door. He said, " Look here, M. Poirot. I don't like this."

" What don't you like, Admiral Chandler ? "

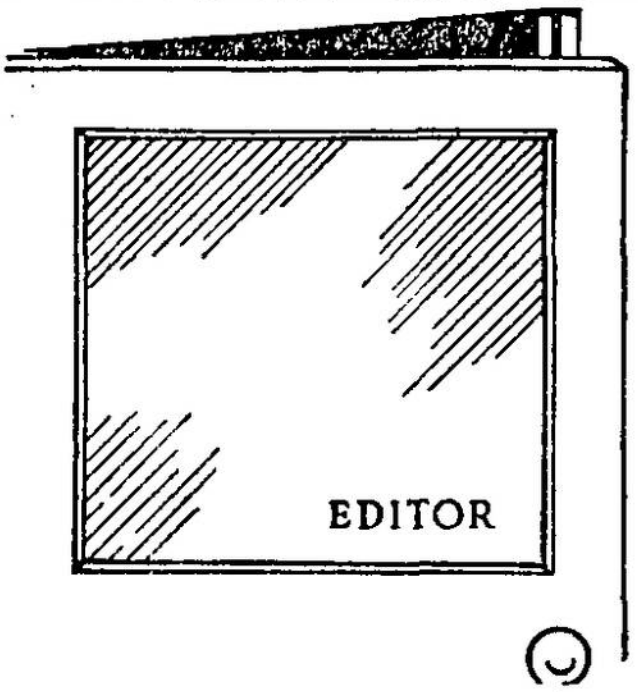
" Diana has been insisting that you and she should both spend the night here. I don't want to be inhospitable—"

" It is not a question of hospitality."

" As I say, I don't like being inhospitable—but frankly, I don't like it, M. Poirot. I—I don't want it. And I don't understand the reason for it. What good can it possibly do ? "

" Shall we say that it is an experiment I am trying ? "

" What kind of an experiment ? "



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"That, you will pardon me, is my business . . ."

"Now look here, M. Poirot, I didn't ask you to come here in the first place—"

Poirot interrupted.

"Believe me, Admiral Chandler, I quite understand and appreciate your point of view. I am here simply and solely because of the obstinacy of a girl in love. You have told me certain things. Colonel Frobisher has told me certain things. Hugh himself has told me certain things. Now—I want to see for myself."

"Yes, but see *what*? I tell you, there's nothing to see! I lock Hugh into his room every night and that's that."

"And yet—sometimes—he tells me that the door is not locked in the morning?"

"What's that?"

"Have you not found the door unlocked yourself?"

Chandler was frowning. "I always imagined George had unlocked—what do you mean?"

"Where do you leave the key—in the lock?"

"No, I lay it on the chest outside. I, or George, or Withers, the valet, take it from there in the morning. We've told Withers it's because Hugh walks in his sleep . . . I daresay he knows more—but he's a faithful fellow, been with me for years."

"Is there another key?"

"Not that I know of."

"One could have been made."

"But who—"

"Your son thinks that he himself has one hidden somewhere, although he is unaware of it in his waking state."

Colonel Frobisher, speaking from the far end of the room, said, "I don't like it, Charles . . . The girl—"

Admiral Chandler said quickly, "Just what I was thinking. The girl mustn't come back. Come back yourself, if you like."

Poirot said, "Why don't you want Miss Maberly here tonight?"

Frobisher said in a low voice, "It's too risky. In these cases—"

He stopped.

Poirot said, "Hugh is devoted to her . . ."

Chandler cried, "That's just *why*! Damn it all, man, everything's topsy-turvy where a madman's concerned. Hugh knows that himself. Diana mustn't come here."

"As to that," said Poirot, "Diana must decide for herself."

He went out of the library. Diana was waiting outside in the car. She called out, "We'll get what we want for the night and be back in time for dinner."

As they drove down the long drive, Poirot repeated to her the

conversation he had just held with the Admiral and Colonel Frobisher. She laughed scornfully.

" Do they think Hugh would hurt *me* ? "

By way of reply, Poirot asked her if she would mind stopping at the chemist's in the village. He had forgotten, he said, to pack a toothbrush.

The chemist's shop was in the middle of the peaceful village street. Diana waited outside in the car. It struck her that Hercule Poirot was a long time choosing a toothbrush . . .

In the big bedroom with the heavy Elizabethan oak furniture, Hercule Poirot sat and waited. There was nothing to do but wait. All his arrangements were made.

It was towards early morning that the summons came.

At the sound of footsteps outside, Poirot drew back the bolt and opened the door. There were two men in the passage outside—two middle aged men who looked older than their years. The Admiral was stern faced and grim, Colonel Frobisher twitched and trembled.

Chandler said simply, " Will you come with us, M. Poirot ? "

There was a huddled figure lying outside Diana Maberly's bedroom door. The light fell on a rumpled, tawny head. Hugh Chandler lay there breathing stertorously. He was in his dressing-gown and slippers. In his right hand was a sharply curved, shining knife. Not all of it was shining—here and there it was obscured by red glistening patches.

Hercule Poirot exclaimed softly, " *Mon Dieu !* "

Frobisher said sharply, " She's all right. He hasn't touched her." He called, " Diana ! It's us ! Let us in ! "

Poirot heard the Admiral groan and mutter under his breath, " My boy. My poor boy."

There was a sound of bolts being drawn. The door opened and Diana stood there. Her face was dead white.

She faltered out, " *What's happened?* There was someone—trying to get in—I heard them—feeling the door—the handle—scratching on the panels—Oh ! it was awful . . . *like an animal*, I . . ."

Frobisher said sharply, " Thank God your door was locked ! "

" M. Poirot told me to lock it."

Poirot said, " Lift him up and bring him inside."

The two men stooped and raised the unconscious man. Diana caught her breath with a little gasp as they passed her.

" Hugh ? Is it Hugh ? What's that—on his hands ? "

Hugh Chandler's hands were sticky with a brownish red stain.

Diana breathed, " Is that blood ? "

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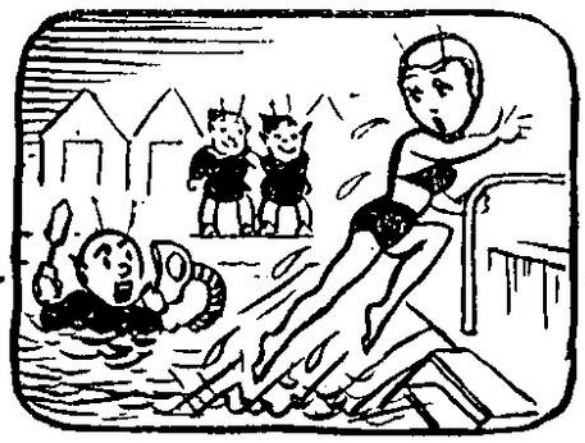

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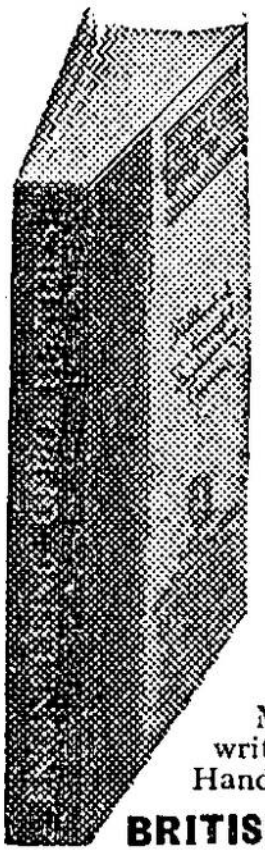

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Poirot looked enquiringly at the two men.

The Admiral nodded. He said, " Not human, thank heavens ! A cat ! I found it downstairs in the hall. Throat cut. Afterwards he must have come up here—"

" *Here ?* " Diana's voice was low with horror. " To *me* ? "

The man on the chair stirred—muttered. They watched him, fascinated. Hugh Chandler sat up. He blinked.

" Hello," his voice was dazed—hoarse. " What's happened ? Why am I—? "

He stopped. He was staring at the knife which he held still clasped in his hand.

He said in a slow, thick voice, " *What have I done ?* "

His eyes went from one to the other. They rested at last on Diana shrinking back against the wall. He said quietly, " Did I attack Diana ? "

His father shook his head. Hugh said, " *Tell me what has happened ?* I've got to know ! "

They told him—told him unwillingly—haltingly. His quiet perseverance drew it out of them.

Outside the window the sun was coming up. Hercule Poirot drew a curtain aside.

Hugh Chandler's face was composed, his voice was steady. He said, " I see."

Then he got up. He smiled and stretched himself. His voice was quite natural as he said, " Beautiful morning, what ? Think I'll go out in the woods and try to get a rabbit."

He went out of the room and left them staring after him.

Then the Admiral started forwards. Frobisher caught him by the arm. " No, Charles, no. It's the best way—for him, poor devil, if for nobody else."

Diana had thrown herself sobbing on the bed.

Admiral Chandler said, his voice coming unevenly, " You're right, George—you're right, I know. The boy's got guts . . ."

Frobisher said, and his voice, too, was broken, " *He's a man* . . ."

There was a moment's silence and then Chandler said, " Damn it, where's that cursed foreigner ? "

In the gunroom, Hugh Chandler had lifted his gun from the rack when Hercule Poirot's hand fell on his shoulder.

Hercule Poirot's voice said one word and said it with a strange authority. He said, " *No !* "

Hugh Chandler stared at him. He said in a thick, angry voice, " Take your hands off me. Don't interfere. *There's going to be an accident*, I tell you. It's the only way out."

Again Hercule Poirot repeated that one word, " *No.*"

"Don't you realize that if it hadn't been for the accident of her door being locked, I would have cut Diana's throat—Diana's!—with that knife?"

"I realize nothing of the kind. You would not have killed Miss Maberly."

"I killed the cat, didn't I?"

"No, you did not kill the cat. You did not kill the parrot. You did not kill the sheep."

Hugh stared at him. He demanded, "Are *you* mad, or am I?"

Hercule Poirot replied, "*Neither of us is mad.*"

It was at that moment that Admiral Chandler and Colonel Frobisher came in. Behind them came Diana.

Hugh Chandler said in a weak, dazed voice, "This chap says I'm not mad . . ."

Hercule Poirot said, "I am happy to tell you that you are entirely and completely sane."

Hugh laughed. It was a laugh such as a lunatic might popularly be supposed to give.

"That's damned funny! It's sane, is it, to cut the throats of sheep and other animals? I was sane, was I, when I killed that parrot? And the cat tonight?"

"I tell you you did not kill anything."

"Then who did?"

"*Someone who has had at heart the sole object of proving you insane.* On each occasion you were given a heavy soporific and a blood stained knife or razor was planted by you. It was someone else whose bloody hands were washed in your basin."

"But why?"

"In order that you should do what you were just about to do when I stopped you."

Hugh stared. Poirot turned to Colonel Frobisher.

"Colonel Frobisher, you lived for many years in India. Did you never come across cases where persons were deliberately driven mad by the administration of drugs?"

Colonel Frobisher's face lit up. He said, "Never came across a case myself, but I've heard of them often enough. Datura poisoning. It ends by driving a person insane."

"Exactly. Well, the active principle of the datura is very closely allied to, if it is not actually, the alkaloid atropine—which is also obtained from belladonna or deadly nightshade. Belladonna preparations are fairly common and atropine sulphate itself is prescribed freely for eye treatments. By duplicating a prescription and getting it made up in different places a large quantity of the poison could be obtained without arousing suspicion.

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into, say—a soothing shaving cream. Applied externally it would cause a rash, this would soon lead to abrasions in shaving and thus the drug would be continually entering the system. It would produce certain symptoms—dryness of the mouth and throat, difficulty in swallowing, hallucinations, double vision—*all the symptoms, in fact, which Mr. Chandler has experienced.*"

He turned to the young man.

" And to remove the last doubt from your mind, I will tell you that that is not a supposition but a fact. *Your shaving cream was heavily impregnated with atropine sulphate.* I had a sample tested."

White, shaking, Hugh asked, " *Who did it?* Why ? "

Hercule Poirot said, " That is what I have been studying ever since I arrived here. I have been looking for a motive for murder. Diana Maberly gained financially by your death, but I did not consider her seriously—"

Hugh Chandler flashed out, " I should hope not ! "

" I envisaged another possible motive. The eternal triangle; two men and a woman. Colonel Frobisher had been in love with your mother. Admiral Chandler married her."

Admiral Chandler cried out, " George ? George ! I won't believe it."

Hugh said in an incredulous voice, " Do you mean that hatred could go on—to a *son* ? "

Hercule Poirot said, " Under certain circumstances, yes."

Frobisher cried out, " It's a damned lie ! Don't believe him, Charles."

Chandler shrank away from him. He muttered to himself, " The datura . . . India—yes, I see . . . And we'd never suspect poison—not with madness in the family already . . ."

" *Mais oui !* " Hercule Poirot's voice rose high and shrill. " *Madness in the family.* A madman—bent on revenge—cunning—as madmen are, concealing his madness for years." He whirled round on Frobisher. " *Mon Dieu*, you *must* have known, you *must* have suspected, that Hugh was *your* son ? Why did you never tell him so ? "

Frobisher stammered, gulped.

" I didn't know. I couldn't be sure . . . You see, Caroline came to me once—she was frightened of something—in great trouble. I don't know, I never have known, what it was all about. She—I—we lost our heads. Afterwards I went away at once—it was the only thing to be done, we both knew we'd got to play the game. I—well, I wondered, but I couldn't be sure. Caroline never said anything that led me to think Hugh *was* my son. And then when this—this streak of madness appeared, it settled things definitely, I thought."

Poirot said, " Yes, it settled things ! *You* could not see the way

the boy has of thrusting out his face and bringing down his brows—a trick he inherited from *you*. *But Charles Chandler saw it.* Saw it years ago—and learned the truth from his wife. I think she was afraid of him—he'd begun to show her the mad streak—that was what drove her into your arms—you whom she had always loved. Charles Chandler planned his revenge. His wife died in a boating accident. He and she were out in the boat alone and he knows how that accident came about.

" Then he settled down to feed his concentrated hatred against the boy who bore his name but who was not his son. Your Indian stories put the idea of datura poisoning into his head. Hugh should be slowly driven mad. Driven to the stage where he would take his own life in despair. The blood lust was Admiral Chandler's, not Hugh's. It was Charles Chandler who was driven to cut the throats of sheep. But it was Hugh who was to pay the penalty!

" Do you know when I suspected? When Admiral Chandler was so averse to his son seeing a doctor. For Hugh to object was natural enough. But the father! There might be treatment which would save his son—there were a hundred reasons why *he* should seek to have a doctor's opinion. But no, a doctor must not be allowed to see Hugh Chandler—in case a doctor should discover that *Hugh was sane*!"

Hugh said very quietly, " Sane . . . I *am* sane?"

He took a step towards Diana. Frobisher said in a gruff voice, " You're sane enough. There's no taint in *our* family."

Diana said, " *Hugh* . . ."

Admiral Chandler picked up Hugh's gun. He said, " All a lot of nonsense! Think I'll go and see if I can get a rabbit—"

Frobisher started forward, but the hand of Hercule Poirot restrained him. Poirot said, " You said yourself—just now—that it was the best way . . ."

Hugh and Diana had gone from the room.

The two men, the Englishman and the Belgian, watched the last of the Chandlers cross the Park and go up into the woods.

Presently, they heard a shot . . .

* * *

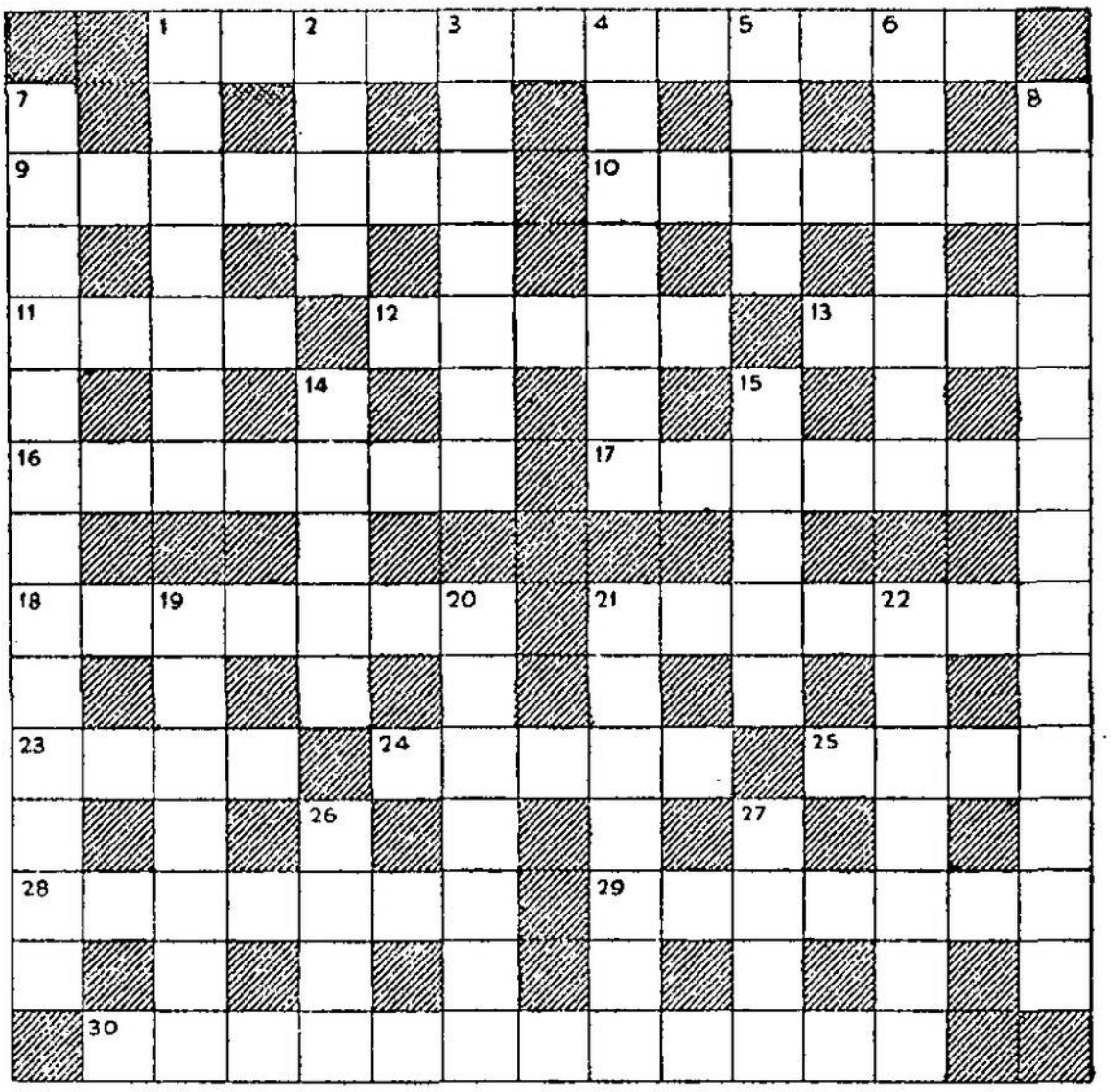
SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 160

Across. 1, Maid of Honour. 9, Restive. 10, Solicit. 11, Meet. 12, Madam. 13, Over. 16, Maypole. 17, Equerry. 18, Nostrum. 21, Cripple. 23, Step. 24, Angle. 25, Grit. 28, Emperor. 29, Brindle. 30, Telephone Box.

Down. 1, Mastery. 2, Iris. 3, Operate. 4, Hostage. 5, Nile. 6, Uncover. 7, Prime Minister. 8, Stormy Weather. 14, Sorry. 15, Turin. 19, Steeple. 20, Monarch. 21, Caliban. 22, Paradox. 26, Free. 27, Limb.

ARGOSY CROSS WORD

Solution on page 159



CLUES

Across

1 Woman of her word ? (4, 2, 6).

9 For the rest, I've had it ! (7).

10 Ask again and again (7).

11 The gathering of the reds (4).

12 This lady had a really idiotic morning ! (5).

13 Finis (4).

16 Barnaby Rudge's "house of public entertainment" (7).

17 Male counterpart of 1 across (7).

18 It's a silly goose who buys this from a quack (7).

21 The hundredth ruffle—probably a non-runner (7).

23 Pace that gives the favourites a setback (4).

24 At the corner of the square (5).

25 Determination that may be painful to the eye (4).

28 A ruler—but more than a foot long (7).

29 No albino, this terrier ! (7).

30 The home of A. and B. Button (9, 3).

Down

1 The skill of a flower in my setting (7).

2 "In the Spring a livelier—changes on the burnish'd dove" (Alfred, Lord Tennyson) (4).

3 We all but took tea after the opera (7).

4 The deer is caught in the gardener's tool (7).

5 "England may as well dam up the waters of the — with bulrushes as to fetter the step of Freedom" (Lydia Maria Child) (4).

6 Bring to light (7).

7 The fittest executive in the land ? (5, 8).

8 Mercury's decline may suggest this (6, 7).

14 I beg your pardon ! (5).

15 A stutter is canned in Italy (5).

19 Jack is looking for his job ! (7).

20 28 across perhaps (7).

21 The evil natured monster in "The Tempest" (7).

22 Not in the least straightforward (7).

26 The best things in life (4).

27 I'm in almost l.b.w. with this part of me (4).

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A Faicney